

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Genesis 50:15-21

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept. ¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

50:15 *holds a grudge ... and pays us back.* Similarly, Esau had once planned to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died (see 27:41). (CSB)

The brothers, still troubled by their sin, doubted Joseph's forgiveness. Luther: "For it is not without great difficulty that the heart longs for the kindness and pardon of God, from whom it flees and turns away by nature when it feels that He has been offended by many great and enormous sins. Then it is hard to grant admittance to consolation, and it is difficult for remission to cling to the heart, no matter with how many promises and with how many signs of God's goodwill it has been confirmed. From this one can gather what a sharp poison sin is in man's nature" (AE 8:324). (TLSB)

Joseph's brothers, father, and extended family had been living in Egypt now for seventeen years (47:28), but complete reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers had not taken place. The ten brothers had lived in guilt of their evil deeds toward Joseph, but in the assurance that Joseph would not harm them while their father was still alive, causing Jacob more grief. Now that Jacob was dead, they feared that Joseph was "holding a grudge against them" (*yistemenu*) and would finally retaliate in revenge, "reversing to us" (*wehashev*) the evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

A guilty conscience is a terrible thing to live with. The brothers couldn't erase the haunting memories of what they had done thirty-nine years earlier. (PBC)

There was no end of possibilities that their excited imagination conjured up before them. (Leupold)

50:16-17 Commentators are divided on whether Jacob actually gave this command to Joseph through his brothers or whether they made the story up in a desperate attempt to save their own lives. It is likely that the ten brothers are continuing their past practice of deceit (37:32), which had gone on for over twenty years of watching their father grieve over Joseph. If Jacob had made this command, he probably would have done so

much earlier, and he would have spoken to Joseph himself. Joseph seems to have been present at his father's final words before his death (50:1), another opportune time to tell this to Joseph. It is merely conjecture, but this first appeal from the ten brothers perhaps came in a message sent to Joseph, perhaps by Benjamin, to soften him up. Joseph wept at this request, hurt that his brothers feared him and had now suffered unnecessarily for seventeen more years, thinking he would harm them. Joseph had forgiven them long ago and was not burdened with thoughts of revenge. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:16 *sent a message.* They were afraid to approach Joseph. (TLSB)

It also dawned on them that since their father was no longer around they were totally at the mercy of Joseph. Would he now finally settle accounts with the brothers who had treated him so shamefully? They sent a message to Joseph, perhaps through Benjamin. (PBC)

There is a measure of mistrust revealed by the brothers. (Leupold)

Your father gave this command. Either the brothers were lying, or this fact was not mentioned earlier. (TLSB)

50:17 FORGIVE YOUR BROTHERS THE SINS AND WRONGS THEY COMMITTED IN TREATING YOU SO BADLY – The best aid to the understanding of the entire situation is to use the approach set forth with greatest emphasis by Luther, who pictures graphically what a bitter thing sin is – easy to commit, but after it has come to light it rears its ugly head, and it prick keeps rankling, “so that no forgiveness and comfort are strong enough to alleviate the bite and to remove the prick.” Consequently, their feeling of guilt is their primary trouble. (Leupold)

Joseph wept. See note on 43:30. Joseph may have been saddened by the thought that his brothers might be falsely implicating their father in their story. Or he may have regretted his failure to reassure them sooner that he had already forgiven them. (CSB)

He wept tears of sadness – sadness over the torture his brothers must have been going through, sadness also over the fact that they had not believed him when he assured them of his forgiveness. (PBC)

50:18 *threw themselves down.* A final fulfillment of Joseph's earlier dreams (see note on 37:7; see also 37:9). (CSB)

The brothers joined the messengers, gratefully and repentantly acknowledging Joseph. (TLSB)

fall. Extreme form of bowing, expressing repentance (Gn 50:18), fearful submission (Nu 22:31), awe (Nu 24:4; 22:31), pleading (Nu 14:5), humility (Nu 16:4, 22, 45; 20:6; Lk 8:41), worship (Lk 17:16), or grief (Mk 14:35). (TLSB p. 1276)

Following the brothers' message to Joseph, the ten now appear before Joseph and beg for their lives. Joseph's earlier, prophetic dreams (37:5–9) were being fulfilled for a second time as his brothers were again bowing before him in obeisance (as they had done years earlier before he, as ruler of Egypt, had revealed himself to them, 42:6, 9). The irony is that they now offer to serve him, as years before they had sold him into servitude. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

We are your slaves. They had earlier expressed a similar willingness, but under quite different circumstances (see 44:9, 33). (CSB)

They did not assume rights of brotherhood but rather of servitude (cf Lk 15:19). (TLSB)

Their sorrow is so genuine and their repentance so genuine that these brothers come on the heels of their messenger and offer themselves to Joseph as his slaves. (Leupold)

50:19 DON'T BE AFRAID – Complete forgiveness gets rid of fear.

Although standing second in command of all Egypt, Joseph attempts to quell his brothers' needless fear by humbly appealing to God's complete rule in matters of judgment and vengeance, asking, "Am I in the stead (*hathachath*) of God?" Joseph has had years of perspective in watching the mysterious plans of God unfold into great blessings for countless people, and who is he to question God's methods? (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment."

Am I in the place of God? See note on 30:2. (CSB)

Vengeance belongs to God alone (Rm 12:19). As a brother, Joseph is to pardon and forgive. (TLSB)

The person who takes vengeance tries to play God, and Joseph had no stomach for that. (PBC)

It means is: have I the right to do so? Joseph explains this by saying that the proof of God's control of the situation lies in the fact that where they on their part did devise evil against him, God devised it for good – a remarkable example of God's concurrence, overriding the evil consequence of the wicked deed to bring about results remarkably blessed. (Leupold)

50:20 *God intended it for good.*† Their act, out of personal animosity toward a brother, had been used by God to save life—the life of the Israelites, the Egyptians and all the nations that came to Egypt to buy food in the face of a famine that threatened the known world. All servants of the God of Jacob have the assurance that he intends it for good when they suffer injustice (1Pe 1:6–7; 4:12–14; 5:10; Ro 5:3–5). (CSB)

Luther: “God causes good to result from evil, not that He wants evil to be done, but His goodness is so great even in our wickedness that He cannot do otherwise than forgive sin if the sinner sobs and implores His mercy. If this happens the sin shall be forgiven” (AE 8:330). (TLSB)

God had brought about a change of attitude in the brothers. God furthermore overruled their evil deed and had actually used it to save people from starvation.

Joseph virtually repeats the words he spoke when he first revealed himself to his brothers seventeen years earlier (45:5–8). Did they forget or doubt? Joseph doesn’t dismiss his brothers’ evil actions but compares them with God’s higher intentions. “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (*chashavtem ‘alay ra’ah ’elohim chashavah letovah*). Joseph understands that God had a greater purpose in allowing the evil actions of his brothers, as well as those of Potiphar’s wife and the forgetful cupbearer of Pharaoh, to hurt him. God turns the evil of man so that good will come out of it. God meant it for his divine, mysterious purposes that we may or may not ever understand. Here, Joseph sees God’s benevolent intent: “to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.” That included not only the immediate inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan, but also Jacob’s extended family through Judah and his descendants to Jesus, and thus eventually saving all mankind through him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:21 DON’T BE AFRAID – This does not imply that the famine was still in progress. But it does suggest that as strangers in Egypt, Jacob’s sons could well use an influential person like Joseph to guard their interests and represent fait play. (Leupold)

comforted ... kindly. Luther: “You should not sin rashly, confident of obtaining God’s pardon; but you should rely on this pardon and find rest in it only when you are in despair. And here the pastor and the ministers of the church should give assistance; and mercy, which is far greater than sin, should be glorified” (AE 8:331–32). (TLSB)

The Hebrew says: “he spoke to their hearts.” (Leupold)

Again, Joseph instructs them to “fear not” (*’al-tira’u*) any retaliation against them. The part of repentance with which they struggled most was believing that they had truly been forgiven, both by God and by Joseph. To prove his gracious and loving intentions, Joseph took care of his brothers and their families, just as he had been doing for seventeen years. It is always the Gospel of God’s grace and mercy, not the Law, that brings about repentance and changes lives. Finally, Joseph and his brothers were reconciled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

50:15–21 Jacob’s sons fear that only their father’s presence prevented Joseph’s revenge for their earlier hatred and violence. But Joseph consoles them and speaks kindly to them. Reconciliation should come from the heart and be confirmed by our deeds, just as Joseph provided for his brothers’ families in addition to forgiving them. Sin penetrates flesh and spirit and can lead people to despair. To console despairing sinners, God causes the Gospel of reconciliation in

Christ to be preached, and He confirms this message with the comforting Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Supper. • O Lord, though humans meant to do evil to You with the cross, You meant it for good, to bring about eternal salvation. Praise to You, O Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 14:1-12

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ² One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Ch 14 Luth: "In chapter 14 [Paul] teaches that consciences weak in faith are to be led gently, spared, so that we do not use our Christian freedom for doing harm, but for the assistance of the weak. For where that is not done, the result is discord and contempt for the gospel; and the gospel is the all-important thing. Thus it is better to yield a little to the weak in faith, until they grow stronger, than to have the teaching of the gospel come to nothing. And this work is a peculiar work of love, for which there is great need even now, when with the eating of meat and other liberties, men are rudely and roughly—and needlessly—shaking weak consciences, before they know the truth" (AE 35:379). (TLSB)

14:1–15:7 Deals with debates over matters of freedom within the Christian community. The "weak" in faith are unsure of the extent of their freedom. (TLSB)

14:1 *whose faith is weak.* Probably Jewish Christians at Rome who were unwilling to give up the observance of certain requirements of the law, such as dietary restrictions and the keeping of the Sabbath and other special days. Their concern was not quite the same as that of the Judaizers of Galatia. The Judaizers thought they could put God in their debt by works of righteousness and were trying to force this heretical teaching on the Galatian churches, but the "weak" Roman Christians did neither. They were not yet clear as to the status of OT regulations under the new covenant inaugurated by the coming of Christ. (CSB)

welcome him. Receive the “weak” because God and Christ have welcomed both of you (v 3; 15:7). (TLSB)

without passing judgment on disputable matters.† Fellowship among Christians is not to be based on everyone’s agreement on disputable questions. Christians do not, nor do they need to, agree on all matters pertaining to the Christian life—what are called *adiaphora* (matters which Scripture neither commands nor forbids). (CSB)

First-century Jews and Gentiles in Rome were likely divided over the applicability of OT dietary laws and festivals. (TLSB)

14:2 *One man’s faith.* In contrast, Paul now describes the “strong” Christian. Here faith is used in the sense of assurance or confidence. The strong Christian’s understanding of the gospel allows him to recognize that one’s diet has no spiritual significance. (CSB)

eat anything. Jesus declared all foods clean (cf Lv 11; 17:10–16; Mk 7:18–19; Ac 10:9–15). Believers are free from the restrictions of OT food laws. NT believers are also free to continue abiding by those laws and so to refuse unclean foods. Eating meat offered to pagan idols may also be involved (as in 1Co 8–10). (TLSB)

WEAK EATS ONLY VEGETABLES – Paul does not urge a weak and watery toleration of the heretic, the violator of the truth of the Gospel. The strong in faith can eat all things; no line of demarcation between clean and unclean food exists for him. The fact that the meat which he buys in the market has been part of an offering made to a pagan idol does not, for him, erase from it the Creator’s mark of ownership; he eats it with a will and thanks the Lord for it. (Franzmann)

14:3 *God has welcomed him.* Within the Christian community, God has accepted each one of us to Himself in Christ (15:7). (TLSB)

14:4 The issues here are not of right and wrong, but opinions on matters now debatable (v 1). Our common Lord and Master Jesus Christ has freed us in regard to these issues; we are not free to judge His servants concerning them. (TLSB)

someone else’s. God’s. A Christian must not reject a fellow Christian, who is also a servant of God. (CSB)

To his own master he stands or falls. The “weak” Christian is not the master of his “strong” brother, nor is the “strong” the master of the “weak.” God is Master, and to him alone all believers are responsible. (CSB)

14:5 *one day more sacred than another.* Some feel that this refers primarily to the Sabbath, but it is probably a reference to all the special days of the OT ceremonial law. (CSB)

The Sabbath, Passover, and other OT festivals had been “holier” days (cf Lv 23). But Christ has freed us from the requirement to observe them. (TLSB)

considers every day alike. All days are to be dedicated to God through holy living and godly service. (CSB)

fully convinced in his own mind.† The importance of personal conviction and of a correct conscience in disputable matters of conduct runs through this passage (see vv. 14, 16, 22–23). (CSB)

14:6 The motivation behind the actions of both the strong and the weak is to be the same: Both should want to serve the Lord and give thanks for his provision. (CSB)

One may continue to observe the Sabbath and other OT festivals as a matter of freedom and a way to honor the Lord Jesus. (TLSB)

GIVES THANKS TO GOD – As the eating so also the non-eating is done to the service and glory of the Lord.

abstains. Probably abstaining from unclean foods. One is able to voluntarily do so in honoring the Lord. (TLSB)

No man can impose his own convictions on his neighbor, no more than he can live by his neighbor’s convictions. (Franzmann)

14:7–8 Life and death itself cannot separate us from Christ (8:38–39); therefore a “quarrel over opinions” (v 1) ought not separate us. (TLSB)

14:7 *none of us lives to himself alone.* The reference is to “us” Christians. We do not live to please ourselves but the Lord. (CSB)

In Christ’s Body, we are joined one to another (12:5); we are never alone and ought not live to ourselves. (TLSB)

none of us dies to himself alone. Even in death the important thing is one’s relationship to the Lord. Paul repeats the truths of this verse in v. 8. (CSB)

14:8 **WE BELONG TO THE LORD** – Now, at death, and for all eternity, we are with Jesus (1Th 4:14; cf Php 1:23). (TLSB)

14:9 *Lord.* See note on 10:9. Christ’s Lordship over both the dead and the living arises out of his death and resurrection. (CSB)

Jesus is Lord of all (Php 2:11); to God all are alive (Lk 20:38). (TLSB)

14:10 *why do you judge your brother?* Addressed to weak Christians. (CSB)

why do you look down on your brother? Addressed to strong Christians. (CSB)

we will all. Refers to every Christian. (CSB)

God's judgment seat. † All Christians will be judged, and the judgment will be based on works (see 2Co 5:10; cf. 1Co 3:10–15), as evidence of their faith (see Gal 5:22–26). (CSB)

God will hold accountable those who pass judgment on others where He has not done so. (TLSB)

14:11 In Is 45:22, the Lord refutes the existence of other gods. In Php 2:11, Jesus is declared to be the Lord with the same words. (TLSB)

14:12 EACH ONE US WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT – Those entering heaven by grace will still be called to give an account of their earthly lives (cf Mt 25:14–30). (TLSB)

14:1–12 OT food and festival laws had been significant religious issues, but Christ freed us to observe or not to observe them. Christians may judge the conduct of others only on the basis of God's Word. We should not go beyond it and pronounce judgment in matters of Christian freedom. Those who do so wound other believers and will have to account for such behavior before God Himself. In Baptism, we were joined with Christ and one another. Not even death can sever that bond. • In life and in death, O Lord, You promise to abide with me. Thank You for the assurance that I am Yours both now and for eternity. Teach us to speak according to Your Word, but to remain silent where Your Word grants freedom. Amen. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” **22** Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” **23** “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.” **24** As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. **25** Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. **26** “The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’” **27** The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. **28** “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. **29** “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’” **30** “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. **31** When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. **32** “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.’” **33** “Shouldn’t you have had mercy on

your fellow servant just as I had on you?’³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

18:21 HOW MANY TIMES SHALL I FORGIVE – Some rabbis taught that a person should be forgiven three times but no more, citing Amos 2:6 and Job 33:29; but we must note that God kept forgiving Israel for hundreds of years. Peter generously proposed that the number be more than doubled – make it seven times, a number that can represent God’s perfection (cf. Gen 2:3; rev 1:20; 5:6). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Peter’s question was a follow-up to the instructions Jesus had given on how to treat a sinning brother (vv 15–20). (TLSB)

seven times? Peter probably regarded his suggestion as quite lenient since some rabbis taught that one needed to forgive the same sin only three times. (TLSB)

18:22 *seventy-seven times*. Times without number (see NIV text note). (CSB)

Jesus meant that forgiveness has no limits. (TLSB)

The Greek number could be 77 or $70 \times 7 = 490$. But in either case, Jesus was not tagging 490 or 77 as the number of times a person was to be forgiven. God does not number our sins: “If you O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness” (Ps. 130:3-4). He forgives totally because of Jesus’ saving work. Christians also are called to forgive completely, with no restraints. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Jesus declares that forgiveness eschews all moral arithmetic and keeping of any record. Jesus says that, in effect, there can be no limit to the forgiveness given and received between those who are His disciples. (CC)

Don’t keep score and finally decide that enough is enough. If God kept such a record of our sins, He would have written us off long ago. We need God’s forgiveness over and over every day as long as we live. (PBC)

18:23-35 Jesus also told this parable to make His point that forgiveness has no limits for those who repent. (TLSB)

The king had come to check on his servants’ accounts.

The parable is composed of an introduction (18:23) and a concluding interpretation (18:35) that are wrapped around three scenes:

1. The master’s compassion for the hopelessly indebted slave (18:24-27)

2. That forgiven slaves refusal to show mercy to his fellow slave who had far less debt (18:28-30)
3. The master's angry retraction of his forgiveness and the subsequent punishment of the unforgiving slave (18:31-34) (CC)

The striking parallels and even more significant contrasts between scene 1 and scene 2 advance the plot of this little story and communicate its essential theology. Although scene 3 is the obvious and grim result is described.

First I can describe the parallels between the first two scenes. Both scenes begin by presenting the figure of one who is indebted to another. The first slave is indebted to his master (18:24), and the fellow slaves owes the first slave (18:28). Both indebted people are initially treated mercilessly and, we may think inhumanely. The master orders the first slave, along with his family, to be sold to help pay at least a small fraction of the debt (18:25), and the first slave find his fellow and then begins to choke him to demand payment (18:28). Each of the indebted figures falls down (18:26, 29) before his accuser with the same attitude of supplication. Each also makes a nearly identical verbal appeal to the creditor who is demanding repayment (18:26, 29). (CC)

All the more noteworthy are the contrasts between the first two scenes. Three may be highlighted. The first contrast obviously consists in the relationship between the pairs of figures. In the first scene, it is a master and a slave, whereas the scene depicts two fellow slaves. Second and even more obvious is the contrast between the amounts of debt in each case. The first slave's debt is so large that he could never pay it off. The staggering amount forces some interpreters to conclude that this "slave" must be equivalent of the provincial governor. No one else, they conclude, could possibly have a debt so immense. The effect of so huge an amount is to reduce the relative size of the second debt to a meaningless speck, even though a hundred denarii was still a considerable sum. (CC)

The third and most significant contrast consists, of course, in the response that comes from the two different creditors after each debtor has made his appeal for patience and the chance to repay. The first slave has incredibly promised that, given the opportunity, he will repay the entire amount – he simply has asked for more time (18:26). Even more unexpectedly, his master feels compassion for him, unilaterally releases him, and forgives him the entire, catastrophically large debt (18:27). By shocking contrast, this slave who has been released from an unthinkable burden goes out and finds a fellow slave who owes him a sum that in this context scarcely deserves to be called a debt at all. When the fellow slaves makes the nearly identical appeal for patience and promises (reasonably enough) to repay (18:29), the pardoned slave "kept on not being willing" to be patient or to forgive. Instead, he imprisoned his fellow slave, demanding that he pay what was owed. (CC)

There is a terrifying contrast with the master's original response to this slave, now that the master is enraged. It was a casual predicate position participle that had provided the master's motivation for forgiveness: "Because he felt compassion (18:27). Now it is

another casual predicate position participle that indicates the master's motivation for his condemnation: "because he was angry" (18:34). The slave's fate reflects his earlier presumptuous request: as he promised that he would repay "all things/everything" (18:26), now he will be imprisoned until he might repay "aa that was being owed" (18:34). This judgment is clearly just. (CC)

I would propose that the effect of 18:35 is threefold. First, the injustice and pettiness of the wicked slave cannot be denied; he should have forgiven his fellow! That means that I, as a disciple, should forgive – it is the right thing to do because the Master has already had compassion on me. Second, Jesus' words allow for no wiggle room. Just as that master condemned the evil slave to torment in a prison from which he could never escape, so God will condemn all who do not forgive. That means that I, as a disciple, must forgive: there is no other option if I want to avoid everlasting agony. Third, and most challenging theologically, the justice and the necessity of forgiving my brother drive me to the question of empowerment. How will it be possible? How can I do this? (CC)

The Unforgiving Servant, then brings every believing disciple of Jesus face-to-face with this question: Since it is right and necessary, how is it possible that I can forgive my brother or sister, even one who sins against me repeatedly? The ultimate answer is found in the structure of the parable itself. It all depends on locating my own act of forgiving in the framework and in the flow of God's forgiveness. (CC)

18:23 KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE – The kingdom is God's gracious rule in the lives of his people. Jesus likens its operation to a human king who wanted to get to the bottom line with those he had appointed to manage his empire. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

SETTLEMENT – This is a technical expression used in business and commerce. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:24 TEN THOUSAND TALENTS – This was an astronomical amount, estimated at \$10 to 20 Million, depending on the weight and nationality of the coinage, and the effect of inflation. The implication is that our sin puts us so far in debt to God that we ourselves can never repay the amount. His forgiveness is the only way our account can be settled favorably. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The "ten thousand talents" (v. 24) was an astronomical amount, estimated at \$10 to 20 million, depending on the weight and nationality of the coinage, and the effect of inflation. A talent was a monetary unit worth twenty years' wages for a laborer. (TL SB)

ESV note indicates that the debt of one servant was fantastically high, more than what one individual could ever hope to repay. (TL SB)

ESV note – a talent was a monetary unit worth twenty years' wages for a laborer. (TL SB)

18:25 *sold*. The king ordered a most degrading and protracted punishment for this debtor and his family—slavery. (TLSB)

For this practice of selling into slavery see Ex 21:2; Lev 25:39; 2Ki 4:1; Ne 5:5; Isa 50:1. (CSB)

Debtors in Israel could be sold into slavery (Ex 22:3; 2 Ki 4:1). Wife and children were considered property that could also go on the auction block to repay debts. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:26 This servant could never repay his debt, though he promised to do so. (TLSB)

BE PATIENT – makrothumeo literally means “holding back anger for a long time.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

HE BEGGED – The servant did not make excuses or deny his debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:27 TOOK PITY – From sklagchnidzomai which describes Jesus in Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Out of pity, the king forgave the gigantic debt. So our heavenly Father has forgiven the enormous debt of our sin. (TLSB)

CANCELED – The king both released him and forgave the debt, sending it into oblivion (Ps 103:12; Micah 7:19) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

THE DEBT – This financial or accounting model of justification is similar to forensic (legal) justification in that the liability of the sinner is immediately and completely canceled by divine decree on account of Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

How grateful that man should have been! But he wasn't. (PBC)

18:28 OWED 100 DENARI – A denarius was the standard wage for one day's labor, so 100 denarii was worth a substantial amount of money. However, one talent was worth 6000 denarii, so the debt the king forgave was 600,000 times larger than this debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

This debt is thousands of times less than what the king had forgiven the first servant. (TLSB)

18:29 Second debtor made almost the same appeal as had the forgiven servant (v 26). (TLSB)

BE PATIENT – The same verb makrothumeo, is also used of patient Christian love toward others (1 Cor 13:4; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Peter 3:9) and of Christians waiting

patiently for Christ's return (James 5:7-8). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:30 BUT HE REFUSED – It would seem only natural that he would cheerfully forgive that man his small debt, but instead he became violent and demanded immediate payment in full. He turned a deaf ear to the man's pleas for mercy and his promises to pay the debt as soon as possible. (PBC)

Forgiven servant showed no pity to his fellow servant. (TLSB)

18:32 wicked servant! Not for running up an enormous debt but for refusing to forgive his fellow servant. (TLSB)

18:33 SHOULDN'T YOU HAVE HAD MERCY – He had been treated with incredible mercy. Should that not generate in him mercy toward the one who owed him the much smaller sum? (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:34 TO BE TORTURED – The Roman historian Livy (59 B.C. – A.D 17) told of “an old centurion complaining that he was taken by his creditors, not into servitude, but to a workhouse and torture, and showing his back scarred with fresh wounds.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Jailers often tortured inmates. The servant who refused to forgive was doomed. This condemnation represents eternal punishment. (TLSB)

ALL HE OWED – This meant that he would never escape, since he had no means to repay the debt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:35 THIS IS HOW MY HEAVENLY FATHER WILL TREAT EACH OF YOU – God forgives us without limit from his hear, for Jesus' sake. He calls us to forgive others in the same way. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

That was Peter's answer to his question about how often to forgive a brother who sinned against him. It is our answer too. As we look at the servant with the impossible debt, we see ourselves, so great is the debt of our sin. Any efforts or promises we may make about paying that debt are meaningless. Our debt only gets larger, for we could not possibly earn forgiveness as fast as we commit more sins. As a matter of fact, we cannot possibly earn any forgiveness at all. Our only hope is in the mercy of our gracious God. And He has told us that He freely forgives us all our sins for Jesus' sake. We are free. We are heirs of everlasting life. No sin stands between us and our heavenly Father. (PBC)

forgive. The one main teaching of the parable. (CSB)

Satan wants us to believe that we have a right to refuse to forgive someone who deliberately harms us, especially if that harm is repeated and the offender shows no

repentance and doesn't even care about being forgiven by us. The devil wants us to imagine that we can derive a certain satisfaction from holding a grudge or even trying to get revenge. But such an unforgiving spirit is spiritual poison, which harms us most of all and threatens to destroy us utterly and eternally. When we forgive others as God forgives us, we are the ones who are blessed by that. When we refuse to forgive others, we endanger our own faith and salvation. (PBC)

Jesus summed up His teaching about how Christians should act toward one another (see note, v 1) by repeating that our heavenly Father expects those whom He has forgiven to forgive others (6:15). The blessing of forgiveness is the defining gift of the Church. No other institution can offer this heavenly blessing. (TLSB)

18:21–35 Jesus teaches that God has forgiven us far more than we will ever be called on to forgive. Our willingness to forgive a brother or sister is grounded in God's abundant mercy toward us. To forgive is to exercise our childlike faith (v 3). Pray for such simplicity of heart; trust likewise in the simple, enduring love of your gracious heavenly Father, who daily forgives all your debts. • Jesus, Your forgiveness for my sin has no limits. Move me likewise to forgive those who sin against me. Amen. (TLSB)