

Lecture 21 – Community Life (cont.); Commitment to the Kingdom

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”
Matthew 18:35 (NIV)

Key Terms

Denarius, talent, commitment

Objectives

- *To explore the meaning of the parable of the unforgiving servant
- *To identify key aspects of Matthew’s commitment to the kingdom

Lead Question

What stands in the way of your full commitment to the kingdom of God?

Community Life (cont.)

II. Teaching Unit # 4: Community Life in the Kingdom

D. Peter’s question: How many times must I do this? 18:21

1. Peter: “If my brother repents, I must forgive. But how many times? Up to 7?”
2. Illustration: the bad neighbors
3. 77 or 490? No difference! Both impossible for unaided humans. So Jesus tells a story.

III. Parable of Unforgiving Servant Enacted and Discussed

A. Puzzles: debt, funds, slavery, torturers? The importance of historical context.

B. Skeleton for interpretation, 18:35

1. King represents God, settling accounts with His subjects.
2. Debtor is member of kingdom. Whether true or false is open to question.
3. Debt is what he owes to God.

C. Exposition of 18:23-35

1. King’s steward unable to pay a debt (18:23-25).
2. The debt of 18:24, Calculate: One talent = 75 pounds silver OR 6000 denarii. One talent = about 20 years’ working wage. 10,000 talents=200,000 years’ wages! At \$ 5-10 per hour...?
3. The symbolism of the debt: Is this a possibility or not? The way parables work.
4. Servant begs, and master has pity (18:26-7).
5. The action to the fellow slave, and its meaning. (One denarius = one day’s wage, so calculate second debt at 100 days’ wages)
6. The eerie parallel of language and its significance.

D. Reader response and application

1. Two drives: to identify and to evaluate
2. With whom can we identify? King? Slave?
 - a. Do we wonder, as Peter did, “How many times shall I forgive?”
 - b. Jesus’ wisdom: portray our sin through a story that lets us rebuke ourselves.

E. Last phase of story 18:31-35

1. King (31-32): “All that debt I forgave you. Was it not necessary for you to forgive?”
2. Behold love (above), severity (34-35) of God.

F. Theology and Christology in the parable: what the story reveals and hides about Jesus

1. Jesus is the king. He is final source of mercy. Jesus is also judge.
2. Jesus is going to Jerusalem (17:22-23). He knows how God will forgive “all that debt.”

G. Observations on teaching or preaching this parable

1. Use your own parabolic stories to evoke the same mood that Jesus’ story did.

2. A clear parable seems to require clear exposition of ancient customs.
3. The principle of end stress does not seem to hold for this parable.

In what ways is the parable of the unforgiving servant convicting? In what ways it is encouraging?

Commitment to the Kingdom: Matthew 19-20

I. Introduction

A. Theme

Kingdom life proven in service to spouse, to children (“little ones”), to community. The concept of discipleship is defined through controversy regarding divorce, children, money.

B. Structure

Disciples prove themselves in relations with little ones (18:1-4, 19:13-15), offending brothers (18:15-35), spouse (19:3-12), and treasured possessions (19:16-26).

C. Interpretation

Matthew 19-20 illustrates the value of grasping multi-chapter textual units.

II. Marriage, Divorce, and Family, 19:3-15

A. The Pharisees’ question about marriage: Is it lawful to divorce *κατα πασαν αιτιαν* (*kata pasan aitian*, “for every reason”)?

1. The positions of Shammai and Hillel in rabbinic debate
2. The old question: What is the least I can give, the minimal fidelity?
3. Jesus replies: Return to God’s plan at creation.

B. Disciples balk; Jesus insists.

Jesus never relaxes commands for sake of human comfort.

C. Jesus receives children, and why it matters.

III. The Rich Young Ruler and Commitment to the Kingdom (Matthew 19 & 20)

A. Structure

Note inclusio at 19:30 and 20:16. Implication for size of textual unit!

B. The rich young ruler

1. Greek, Matt. 19:16: What good thing shall I do “in order to obtain eternal life” (Luke 18:18 “Having done that, can I then count on an eternal reward”)?
2. Jesus’ unexpected approach
3. Finally, “If you insist, there is just one thing...”
4. Application

C. Jesus comments to disciples as rich man leaves.

1. “Hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”
2. Astonishment! In OT, wealth implies God’s favor. If rich can hardly be saved, who is?

D. Peter’s response (half infected and half astute)

1. “We have left everything to follow you!” Boats as an indicator of his relative wealth.
2. Jesus promises Peter a reward, but warns against serving for that reason. “Many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first.”
3. Situation: seeking a reward, but balking at the cost.