

**OS 24A SUNDAY BETWEEN 11 AND 17 SEPTEMBER: SERMON FOR THE
DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 13/9/2026: GEOFF CHADWICK**

THE FORGIVEN BECOMES THE FORGIVER

Matthew 18.21-35

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ ²² Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. ²³ ‘For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ ²⁹ Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’

Jesus loved to tell parables about money. It seems that if you want to get an audience’s attention mention cash. So nothing’s changed! I once heard an adage about politicians:

No matter what they’re talking about, they’re talking about money!

This may be a little unkind, but it reminds us that financial security is often on peoples’ minds.

Jesus also loved hyperbole!

In today’s parable, the slave owes his master ten thousand talents. This equates to about 200,000 years of labour for a common worker. It works out to roughly 2% of the entire Gross Domestic Product of the Roman Empire at the time!

So Jesus really has got the audience's attention! In fact, the audience (including us) is meant to laugh at the amount, but us terribly serious Christians sometimes forget that Jesus had a sense of humour.

One wonders if any of our current Billionaires or Trillionaires would be prepared to cancel a debt as large as the one described here!

Well, back to the parable. The slave is happy to have his debt forgiven but is not inwardly moved by the experience. Having received forgiveness and generosity, he has made no internal attitudinal changes. Forgiveness has not moved his soul.

He then encounters his own slave who owes him 100 denarii. This is 100 day's wages and is a more realistic sum for the workers of Jesus' day. This amount puts the first slave's debt into perspective. If you do the maths 100 Denarii is 0.00016% of 10 000 talents!

It's such a minuscule amount for someone so rich, but for the poorer slave it's a matter of life and death. It's food on the table for three months!

Without wanting to be too political, I was dismayed when some time ago one of the richest people in the world was put in charge of cost cutting the welfare budget of one of the wealthiest nations on earth. Regardless of the personalities involved, the irony of this arrangement was not lost on me.

Now we must remember that this parable is not so much about money, but about our attitude towards forgiveness. Matthew has included it in his Gospel for this very reason. It appears that early converts to Christianity were experiencing an abundance of forgiveness.

Nevertheless, having received it, some were not returning the favour. Putting is simply;

Being forgiven should make you forgiving.

Unfortunately this was not always the case.

Forgiveness is a two-step process, but there are those who don't get past step one. Perhaps we could say that the first step is only half forgiveness. The true test of forgiveness is if the person **forgiven** is then able to **forgive**.

We need to be clear here, as there is much confusion about the nature of forgiveness. It's often confused with having no consequences. Forgiveness does not mean the person who has wronged you should get off scott free. What it does mean, is that you, as the forgiver, are giving up on any revenge you might be harbouring.

Forgiveness is the ability to say and think: *I will not harm the one I have forgiven.*

So how's your forgiveness then?

Has someone wronged you and you are plotting revenge? Maybe it's a recent hurt, or something you have been harbouring for a long time?

Perhaps it's time to remember your own personal encounter with forgiveness. That time when the 10,000 talents you owed were wiped away. This, of course, isn't easy, especially when the pain of being wronged, and the desire for revenge are very real. It's easy to let our raw emotions get in the way of forgiveness. We may even want to *grab the other by the throat!* Nevertheless, once forgiving acts are remembered, it is possible for the *forgiven one to be forgiving.*

I remember a time I got grumpy! (Just one!)

I had closed an account with a particular business only to be sent a bill for a \$1 cancellation fee. I was not happy so went into their customer service centre, waited in line for an hour with a \$1 coin in my hand, and was then told that I had to pay it electronically by opening a new account!

Then suddenly I remembered; this person is doing their job as best they can. They weren't the one who designed the system and they're not out to get me. So with a deep breath I asked to see their manager.

Expecting a confrontation, I imagined a conversation in my head. I devised a clever and careful speech pleading my case. Was it revenge? Perhaps so, but the manager came out, gave me back my \$1 coin and said: *Yes the system is stupid. Your debt is waived.* I felt so much better!

Forgiven I was, but not over a paltry \$1, but over a stupid payment system.

So now, when someone comes to me angry about a stupid rule, I'm keen to look past the anger to see if there really is a stupid system error. Sometimes there is, and sometimes there isn't. Nevertheless, has the *forgiven become forgiving*? I like to think so, but the proof will always be in the pudding!

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.