

**Sermon:** *The Unforgiving Methodist*  
**Text:** *Matthew 18:21 – 35*  
**Date:** *September 14, 2008 AM*  
**Place:** *Jesup First UMC*

A motorcycle cop was going along one day when a car ran a red light in front of him. He wasn't able to stop and ran right into the side of the car. Well, he suffered two broken legs and a bump on the head, but he woke up in the hospital with a large bandage on his chest. Well, it was very uncomfortable and after a while, he pulled the hospital gown down far enough to get a better look at what was going on. And there, written in big black letters across the bandage on his chest was this message: *"A gift ... from the nurse you ticketed last week."*

A couple was having marital problems. And on a daily basis, they would get into loud, verbal confrontations. And every time, the husband would be out of control, but the wife was always cool, calm and collected. So, one day, he asked her: *"When I get mad at you, you never fight back. How do you control your anger?"* She said: *"I work it off by cleaning the toilet."* He said: *"Well, how does that help anything?"* She said: *"Oh, I just use your toothbrush."*

Ouch! That hurts! I don't know about you, but it seems to be that unforgiveness is one of the biggest challenges we face. In fact, D.L. Moody once said: *"The one sin that is keeping revival from coming to the church, more lost people from being saved, and more of the blessings of God from coming upon His people, is the sin of an unforgiving spirit."* And I suspect that if Mr. Moody ever visited Jesup, he might say the same thing about us.

Well, one day, Jesus had a conversation with Peter about forgiveness. Peter said: “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how many times should I forgive – up to seven times?” And Jesus said: “No! I tell you seventy seven times.” And then, Jesus told a story about a man who owed a huge debt to the king that he couldn’t pay and just before he was thrown into prison, he begged for leniency and the king forgave him. But then, the man ran into a friend who owed him a lot of money and when the friend couldn’t pay him, he had the man thrown into prison. Well, when the king heard about it, he called for the servant, restored his debt, and had him thrown into prison until he could pay it in full. And Jesus ended the story by saying: “So, my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brothers or sisters from your heart.”

This morning, I want us to reflect together on one of the greatest hindrances to the spiritual health of Christians and churches: the sin of unforgiveness! Now, there are several principles in this passage that you and I would be wise to learn and follow as we seek to be more like Jesus.

### **1. TRUE FORGIVENESS IS LIMITLESS!**

Peter asked Jesus: “How many times must I forgive someone who sins against me ... Seven times?” Now, you have to understand that Peter really thought he was being generous. You see, the prevailing wisdom of Jesus’ day was that a person should be forgiven at least three times. According to the

Talmud, it was three strikes and you're out. But Jesus blew Peter's mind; He said: "Not seven times, but I tell you seventy-seven times." Another translation says: "Not seven times, but I tell you seventy times seven."

Now, Jesus wasn't suggesting that we keep a tally, that we let a person slide 77 times, but not 78 or 490 times, but not 491. He was using exaggeration to make a point: true forgiveness is limitless. In fact, In Luke 17, Jesus said: "If someone sins against you seven times a day and comes to you seven times and asks to be forgive, you must forgive."

Now, that doesn't make much sense to you and me! You see, we live in the same world that Peter lived in: a dog eat dog, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth world, a world that points to the law, "*If you wrong me, I have certain rights.*" But Jesus didn't point to the Law; He pointed to love, because forgiveness has nothing to do with the law, but it has everything to do with love. The Law sets limits; love doesn't! The Law keeps records; love doesn't! The Law remembers the past; love doesn't!

Love is limitless and so is true forgiveness!

## **2. TRUE FORGIVENESS IS COSTLY!**

Verse 23 says: "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began reckoning, one who owed him 10,000 talents was brought to him." Now, here is a man who has been cheated out of 10,000 talents. Someone said an ordinary man would have to work 20 years to earn just one talent. So, he would have

had to work 500 years to pay back the money he owed. In today's money, he owed roughly 9 million dollars. That's a costly debt and forgiving that debt is costly too.

Now, remember, Jesus isn't really talking about money here; He's talking about sin. And the point He's trying to make is this: When people do you wrong, there's nothing they can do to repay you. Oh, they might try! They might give you the money back; they might apologize; they might go out of their way to be nice to you, but what's done is done! You can't put the toothpaste back into the tube.

But there's an even deeper truth here, and that is: there is nothing that you and I can do to pay the debt caused when we sin against God. We owe a debt that we cannot pay. Paul said: "*The wages of sin is death.*" But in His love, God forgives ... and it's a costly forgiveness because it cost Him His only begotten Son.

Forgiveness cost Jesus everything and when you truly forgive those who sin against you, it will cost you something too!

### **3. FORGIVING DETERMINES FORGIVENESS!**

In Jesus' story, the king handed to unforgiving servant over to be tortured until he could repay the debt. And verse 35 says: "*So my Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive ... from the heart.*" In another place, Jesus said: "*If you do not forgive, neither will you be forgiven for with the same measure you use to judge others, you will also be judged.*"

One day, James Oglethorpe said to John Wesley: *“Sir, I never forgive.”* And John Wesley said: *“Then sir, I hope you never sin.”*

Now, here is the insanity of this story: Jesus said the servant’s friend only owed him 100 denarii; that’s a couple hundred dollars in today’s money. And yet, even though he had been forgiven millions of dollars, he couldn’t find it within his heart to forgive a couple hundred dollars. And because of his unforgiveness, the master restored his debt and threw him into prison until he could repay every penny. Forgiving others is a pre-requisite for receiving God’s forgiveness.

Now, you know this story has nothing to do with money ... don’t you? You see, the reality is that when you stop and think about it, there’s no way to measure the full extent of God’s forgiveness. I don’t know if you’re like me, but I mess up so much. I’m always going to God, saying, *“Lord, I really messed up today. Please forgive me.”* And He does! And when you blow it, and you come to Him in repentance, asking for forgiveness, He forgives you too ... because He loves you more than anything.

How, then, can you and I not be forgiving of those who wrong us, who sin against us? Forgiving others determines the measure of God’s forgiveness.

In 1991, Rusty Woomeer was executed in South Carolina for the brutal rape and murder of Della Sellers. During his years in prison, he accepted Christ and during his last days, he only had one request: he wanted the forgiveness of Della’s brother. Then, one day, someone slipped an envelope under

his door; it was a letter from Lee Hewitt, Della's brother and here is what it said: *"For years, I hated you ... but then I became a Christian. And the more I learned about being a Christian, the more I knew I had to forgive you. I didn't want to, but it got so that I couldn't pray the Lord's Prayer – forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. ... So, I prayed about it and God has done a miracle in my heart. I forgive you; we are brothers in Christ and I love you."*

Is there unforgiveness in your heart today? Who do you need to forgive so that you can experience the joy and peace that only God's forgiveness can bring? Let's talk to God about it ...