

Rabbis commonly discussed theological matters, drawing conclusions that were definitive

The accepted Rabbinic thought was that a sin against a person should be forgiven 3 times

But on the 4th time the sin is repeated—there is no more forgiveness

Peter extends that thinking and offers to forgive 7 times—a generous commitment

To which Jesus answers, forgive, not 7 times, but 77 times and tells a parable

Obviously, this doesn't mean that we are to count

and at 78, forgiveness is no longer required

Rather, that forgiving others is how we always respond

This says nothing about setting boundaries or what forgiveness looks like

Clearly, we always forgive

But there are times when we must set boundaries

Forgiving an abuser, doesn't mean letting the abuser continue abusing

Sometimes we mix up forgiving others with open ended trust of the other

But that doesn't mean we aren't to forgive others and do so 77 times

Matthew 18:23-35 – The parable of the unforgiving servant

Characters in the parable—king and servant or slave

The servant could be a civil servant with significant wealth—no differentiation

Either way, it is a person who is subject to another

The king calls in the servant who owes him 10,000 talents

One talent = more than 15 years wages as a laborer and he owes the king 10,000 talents

Clearly the king is owed an astronomical amount of money, which the servant can't pay

The servant begs for mercy—the only thing that can save him from so great a debt

Or else he goes to debtors' prison—even if he's sold, it is a maximum of 1 talent

That the servant promises to repay the debt seems like the impossible desperate plea

I'll give you the moon (which I don't own), if only you will let me go

The king does extend mercy and forgives the entire debt

The servant who was forgiven this horrendous debt, proceeds to demand payment from another slave

The servant is owed 100 denarius = 100 days wages as a laborer

Miniscule compared to the amount the king forgave the servant

He demands payment, which the slave can't pay

The slave also begs for mercy, but the servant refused and threw him in debtors' prison

The king finds out about it and confronts him about not extending mercy to another, as was given him

He is handed over to the jailer until the original debt was paid

The parable ends with these words in verse 35...

"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you if you don't forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Returning to the beginning of the passage, Jesus says to forgive 77 times

Forgiving others goes beyond "the rule" to complete and wholehearted forgiveness of others

Forgive as many times as it takes—that's what Jesus does

A few passages on forgiving people—words of Jesus...

Jesus teaches people to pray. "...forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Matthew 6:12-15 NRSV

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven." Luke 6:37 NRSV

Simon, a Pharisee, objects to a woman touching Jesus, who says, "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Luke 7:47-48 NRSV

From the cross, [Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."] Luke 23:34 NRSV

To those on the Road to Emmaus, Jesus said, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:46-48 NRSV

Then finally, Jesus appears behind locked doors and said to the disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven." John 20:21-23 CEB

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus tells us to forgive others and warns of consequences if we refuse to forgive

But after Jesus' death, he takes it one step further—in both the Gospels of Luke and John

As Jesus prepares to leave this earth—he calls his followers to the work of forgiving sins

We generally resist, yet this is Jesus' command to us

We think this is too big for us to do

We think we can only forgive those who sin directly against us

But read it again: *If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven;*

if you don't forgive them, they aren't forgiven.

Literally, it is: "Those whose sins you forgive have already been forgiven;

those whose sins you do not forgive have not been forgiven."

Jesus sent the disciples and sends all of us, just as God the Father sent Jesus

He gave them and us the Holy Spirit and the power to do the work of God

Now they are to take their place and forgive sins

Jesus' death and resurrection has already completed the work of forgiveness

Now it is ours to enact

Not only must we forgive those who have sinned against us

But we must forgive the sins of everyone—not just those who sinned against us

In the same vein as going into all the world and preach the Gospel—go and forgive sins!

This is powerful work that we have neglected and left it up to some transaction

If you believe in Jesus, then he will forgive you—news unbelievers can't receive

No— **You are forgiven! The work is done! Receive it!**