“The Unforgiving Slave”

Matthew 18:23-35 (NIV):

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."

Setting:

The Parable of the Unforgiving Slave is only present in Matthew. Jesus’ disciples have asked him in the beginning of the chapter in Matthew 18:1 (NIV), “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” During this chapter Jesus is teaching His disciples how to treat one another. The parable can be viewed in three sections; the mercy that the king gives to the slave, the lack of mercy that the slave shows to his servant, and the way that the king handles the actions of the unforgiving slave.
Exegetical Notes:

A modern day reader may have a difficult time understanding the essence of this parable if they are not familiar with the terms “talent” and “denarii”* “The ‘ten thousand talents’ owed by the unforgiving debtor in Matt. 18:24 would be at least 204 metric tons of silver but probably reflect the fabulous sum of 60 million denarii” (Freedman 907).

After understanding the monetary system of the denarius (“…the denarius which was the accepted salary for a day’s work by a common laborer” (Freedman 1086) ) and the talents, one can come to understand that the amount that the first slave owed was over sixty million days worth of work, because one denarius is equal to one day’s wage. That is an un-payable amount of money that the first slave is required to pay. While on the other hand, the servant of the slave is in debt to him by only 100 denarii, or 100 days of wages. This is an enormous amount of debt owed by the first slave and, “some interpreters have suggested that the evangelist has inflated the figure, and that in the lower parable Jesus would have had a lower, more reasonable figure, such as ten talents, or 10,000 denarii” (Hultgren 24). Either way, the idea is that the slave had an enormous debt owed to the king, and the king dismissed it, showing his indescribable mercy.

It was not uncommon for a king or master to sell their slave or servant in exchange for their accumulated debt, like it says in Matthew 18:25. Sometimes slaves or people in debt would often be sent to prison until they could repay their debt. However, as the servant pleaded, “It was out of sheer compassion that the master granted this servant far more that he had asked, completely canceling his huge debt” (Hendriksen 706). It needs to be understood that the idea of a king forgiving a debt that large, at least not sending a slave to prison to pay his debt, was basically bazaar. This can be applied to
understanding that we have a Father that forgives a lifetime amount of sins, which is indescribable and amazing.

**Message:**

The message of this parable is that God is a loving and just God. He will grant us grace and mercy, even when we do not deserve it, and He will give those who deserve Hell, Hell for all eternity. He will also welcome those who where His good and faithful servants into His kingdom to spend eternity with Him. The sum that the first slave owed to the king was an amount that could never be paid. However, the grace of the king (in forgetting the slave’s debt) is made in the parable to make a comparison to the grace of God; a grace that can be obtained by admitting our sins and confessing that Jesus Christ is God and we cannot save ourselves. The action of the slave that does not have mercy on his servant is something that everyone is capable of doing. We are perfectly capable of creating the exact situation that the slave is in; we can ask for forgiveness and receive it, and in return be so selfish, greedy and evil, that we would not grant even a “lesser” mercy upon a fellow brother or sister. The next concept of the parable that Jesus wants us to understand is that we must treat others as we wish ourselves to be treated. Whichever life style we choose, we will receive what we deserve; Hell forever or we will be welcomed into Heaven for eternity.

**Application:**

The Parable of the Unforgiving Slave can be applied to one’s life by recognizing first that we all appreciate to be treated fairly. We want people to treat us as they want to be treated. We desire to be treated with respect, through understanding, empathy, sympathy and compassion. We also need to understand that our behavior either good or
bad will result in certain consequences, those good and those bad. God will reward us for loving others as He loves us, and He will punish us for treating others how He would never treat them. We as Christians can use this as an “emphasis” on how we pick out our actions. We know that if we treat others with love and desire to live for Him all our lives, our Heavenly Father will reward us with eternity beside Him. However, we also know that if we treat others unkindly, hurtfully, and uncompassionate, we will receive the just consequences that we deserve. We can use the basis of right and wrong described in this parable to live generously with love throughout our life time.

WORKS CITED


Good research and reflection

Grade: A