

Jesu Juva

“It’s His Forgiveness to Give, Not Yours to Withhold”

Text: Matthew 18:21-35; Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph nailed it. He got it exactly right. 100%. A-plus.

His brothers were worried that now that their father Jacob was dead, Joseph would get his revenge on them. His revenge for their hating him and wanting to kill him. His revenge for their selling him into slavery. He had already forgiven them . . . or so he said. Maybe he was just biding his time. Waiting. That’s what they had done, after all - waited for a good time to get rid of him. So they sent a message to him: *Dad said to forgive us.*

But Joseph doesn’t listen to them. He doesn’t forgive because “Dad said so” - he forgives because of their other father, their heavenly one. And so he says to his brothers: ***Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?***

And with that, right there, Joseph hits the nail on the head. That, right there, is the problem with not forgiving those who sin against us: *we are putting ourselves in the place of God.* When we do not forgive, we are saying that **I** get to decide who gets forgiven and who does not. And what criteria do you then use? If they’re *really* sorry? If they haven’t sinned against you too many times? If they’re worthy? And you aren’t consistent - choosing to forgive some more than others; judging some more harshly than others. We all do it though, don’t we?

But turn the tables and apply the criteria you use for others to yourself. How pure, how sincere, is your repentance? Do you not sin too many times? Are you worthy? And you quickly see the problem. We like to play God, our sinful natures pull us to put ourselves in the place of God, yet we are the ones who do not deserve forgiveness; we are the ones whose debt is much, much larger than those we don’t want to forgive. And yet you would decide? Who gets your forgiveness and who doesn’t?

No you don’t! That’s putting yourself in the place of God. And *that’s* faith-destroying idolatry.

For here’s the truth: you don’t get to decide who gets forgiveness and who doesn’t. Jesus decided that, and He decided it on the cross. And you know what He decided there? *Everyone* is forgiven. On the cross He was loaded with all the sin of all people of all time, from the sin of Adam and Eve, to the sin of those who put him on the cross, to your sin and mine, to the sins of those who haven’t even been born yet. For time isn’t a problem for God. All the guilt of all the world, heaped on Jesus on the cross. None excluded. That all be atoned for; all forgiven. He did it, once and for all.

And so now you're going to withhold the forgiveness He won of the cross from someone? Someone who really needs it? *Really?*

You hear how ridiculous that sounds, and how ridiculous Peter's question to Jesus then sounds! ***Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?***

And so Jesus tells the parable we heard to help Peter - and us - understand. It is a worrisome parable for many because who among us doesn't have trouble forgiving? But it's not having trouble forgiving that Jesus is talking about here, but the refusal to forgive; the judging someone not worthy of forgiveness; the putting ourselves in the place of God. That is something altogether different and such idolatry, left unchecked and left to grow, will result in unbelief and condemnation. For it is a heart set not in faith toward God, but in judgment and pride and power.

Instead, daily crawl back to your master, to your Saviour, and beg for forgiveness. And you know what? You have it! So merciful and gracious is the Lord of all. For this parable we heard tonight is not a one-time event - it's repeated over and over. Every Sunday we come crawling back and confess: I'm a poor miserable sinner. And the Lord says: *I forgive you all that debt*. And every day you pray the Lord's Prayer: *and forgive us our trespasses. Done*. Our Lord never tires of forgiving you. Not seven times, or seventy-seven times, or even seventy times seven times. Our Lord doesn't count. He forgives.

So don't try to do forgiveness better than God. Don't put yourself in His place. Don't try to parcel it out based on your own thoughts and feelings and desires and judgments. Receive the forgiveness of Christ and give it joyfully. And if you're having trouble forgiving, receive His forgiveness more! For that's the fruit of the forgiveness you receive - more forgiveness for others. Overflowing. That all the world be filled with the forgiveness of Christ, and with His forgiveness, peace and joy. That the joy of the master be the joy of the servant. Both in this life, and in that life where there is no more forgiveness, for there is no more sin. That life where forgiveness reaches its fulfillment in heaven.

And that evil perpetrated against you that you maybe have trouble forgiving?
Like Joseph, you might just be surprised at how God is able to use that for your good . . . and even for the good of those who sinned against you.
For that's the kind of God He is: *merciful and gracious . . . and abounding in steadfast love*.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.