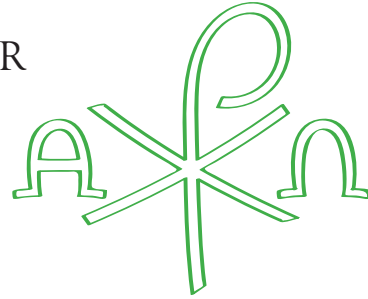


THE TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER

# TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Andrew Richard

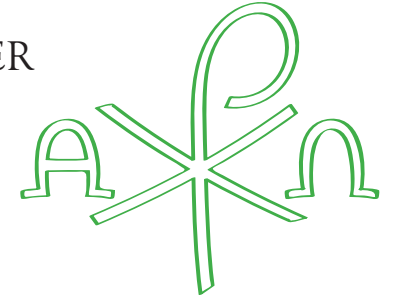


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## MATTHEW 18:21-35 ESV

### Author and Date:

Matthew Levi the apostle around AD 50. The Gospel according to Matthew is structured around five discourses, or sermons, that Jesus delivered. Each discourse ends with the phrase “When Jesus finished...” Today’s Gospel reading is part of Jesus’ Fourth Discourse, which has to do with life in the Church, and particularly emphasizes the importance of reconciliation.

**21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”**

- As generous as Peter thinks he is being with forgiveness, he is still placing a limit on it. The theme of the parable is that there is no point at which God stops forgiving the sins of repentant sinners, nor is there a point at which we’re justified in setting aside forgiveness in favor of wrath.

**22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.**

- Jesus does not give this number as an actual limit, but as a way of expressing that forgiveness should not have a limit.

**23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.**

- The king is Jesus.
- Settling accounts meant calling in debtors and demanding repayment. It was a time of reckoning or accounting, two financial words that still have a sense of judgment to them. God brings His reckoning to us by means of His Law. The Law shows us how indebted we are to Him. If we refuse His reckoning now, we get to reckon with Him on the Last Day when it is too late to hope for grace.

- This is not the first time Jesus has spoken of sins as “debts.” In the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:12 the Fifth Petition reads, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” This parable can be seen as an explanation of this petition.

**24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.**

- This first slave is you.
- A footnote in the ESV says “a *talent* was a monetary unit worth about twenty years’ wages for a laborer,” or in other words, well over a billion dollars, likely closer to ten billion. The parable begins with an odd note of grace in that the king allowed the slave to become this indebted in the first place. He didn’t settle accounts at one talent, or ten, or a hundred, or a thousand, but was patient and forbearing and long-suffering, as God is with us.

**25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.**

- This is the threat of hell.

**26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’**

- “I will pay you everything” is a bunch of useless wind coming from the mouth of a sinner. We cannot provide sufficient payment to atone for a single one of our sins, let alone the whole load of them, plus the sinful corruption of our flesh that produces them.

**27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.**

- The king forgives the debt, but debts don’t just disappear. The king transferred responsibility for

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- The king forgives the debt, but debts don’t just disappear. The king transferred responsibility for making up the loss from the slave to himself. This

making up the loss from the slave to himself. This points to the fact that Jesus took our sins and paid our debts for us. This financial language is used in the Small Catechism, Second Article of the Creed (using language from 1 Peter 1:18-19), "...who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person... not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

- The forgiveness of this slave's great debt is the foundation of the entire parable. It starts with God having mercy on you. This parable makes it clear: God is the originator of grace and forgiveness.

**<sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'**

- A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. A hundred denarii would then equate to about a third of a year's salary, perhaps ten to twenty thousand dollars. It's a significant debt, but nothing compared to what the first slave owed, and that's the point.
- The slave who just had his massive debt canceled seems to have forgotten what the king did for him.

**<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'**

- The fellow-slave speaks the exact same words that the first slave said to the king. At this point the first slave should think, "What am I doing? Why am I holding this measly amount against my brother when the king canceled so much more for me? Dear brother, don't worry about repaying the debt. I cancel the debt, I forgive your sin, with the same grace that our mutual Lord showed to me."

**<sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.**

- The first slave was about to receive this punishment, yet by the mercy of the king he didn't. Now he wishes that fate on his fellow-slave. This desire for vengeance is foreign to Christ. He's the one Man who would have been completely justified in desiring revenge, yet instead He desired your salvation.
- Certainly God knows when you are vengeful toward your fellow-Christians without anyone having to tell Him, but we should understand that an unwillingness

to forgive not only affects the parties directly involved, but scandalizes other Christians who witness it.

**<sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'**

- The ultimate testimony against a Christian who desires retribution is God's previous mercy toward that Christian.
- The word "wicked" is the same as the word for "evil one" in the Seventh Petition of the Lord's Prayer. Desiring forgiveness of sins for yourself but not others is devilish and satanic.
- "As I had mercy on you" is the foundation of Christian reconciliation. The Christian who refuses to reconcile understands neither the gravity of his own sins nor the riches of God's grace in Christ.

**<sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.**

- The slave is thrown into hell. The punishment he previously avoided by God's grace now comes upon him in full because he rejected God's grace.

**<sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'**

- When a fellow-Christian sins against you and repents, you *must* forgive his sin. It is not optional. If you will not, then you are no Christian and whatever hell you think you've escaped is still yours.
- What is the cure for an unforgiving heart? Return to the beginning of the parable. You must hear the amount of your debt: you have sinned beyond belief and deserve to be tortured forever in hell. You must also hear the mercy of Jesus: He has canceled that debt by paying it for you. When you believe that you are as bad as God's Word says you are, and you believe that Jesus is a merciful as God's Word says He is, then forgiving your brother's sin is the most natural thing in the world.

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