

THE PARABLES OF JESUS: WHERE'S THE BEEF ?

A Quest to Better Understand and Respond to the Parables of Jesus

Text: **Matt 18:21-35** The Parable of The Merciful King

Topic: The Parables of Jesus: A Three Act Parable

Theme: Understanding and responding to the Parable of the Merciful King

Review: "Parables are windows to what it is to be a Christian. And a Christian is someone who really wants to be one."

Q1 – So, how many of you remembered Jackie Gleason's Honeymooners? Miss Piggy? Did they help you understand Peter's (our) problem with forgiveness?¹

Q2 –From our previous study, what is the main topic or concern of the parable of the merciful King?²

Looking at the parable, we'll break it down into 3 scenes and go through the 4 guidelines for each:

- **What's the setting** – (who, what, when, where and why)
- **Where's the Beef ?** (the main issue or concern addressed)
- **What is the "twist"?** (the unexpected aspect of the story, what they would not think is true to life)
- **What is the point?** (where the rubber meets the road – but it is crucial we respond to the parable)

Act 1: Please read the Parable of the Merciful King: Matthew 18:21-35 and then vs. 23-27 (again)

Q3 – What is the "Setting"? Who are the main characters, their actions/comments; what is going on, why; what is the size of debt to be repaid and how is it tied to Jesus' answer to Peter's question ...?³

Q4 – Where's the "Beef"?⁴ [Note the behaviors of the main characters, especially of the king.]

Q5 – What is the "Twist"?⁵ [Hint: Read verse 27]

Q6 – What's the "Point"?⁶ [Hint: What does the king have every right to do? Why doesn't he? Who suffers the loss in this deal? -> What does Jesus want Peter, the disciples, (us) to understand about God's forgiveness?]

Q7 – What is your opinion of the King as a result of his canceling the servants debt, completely? ... the servant?⁷

Q8 - Are we truly glad the servant received such extravagant mercy?⁸

Q9 – What title would you give to this scene? (this is extra credit, you're on your own)⁹

Q10 – Have you ever experienced such unrestrained mercy – from any source? How has it changed your life? Have you been able to go and do likewise?

Act 2 – Read Matthew 18:28-31 (be alert to similarities and dissimilarities to Act 1)

Q11 – **What is the "Setting"?** Who are the main characters, their actions/comments; what is going on, why; what's the size of debt to be repaid; how is it tied to Jesus' answer to Peter's question?¹⁰ (yes, the same ? as Q3. I want you to think about the similarities and, more importantly, the differences between this Act (#2) and Act 1?

¹ Peter/we want there to be a limit, a point beyond which he/we are justified in not forgiving (which is to say: a limit beyond which he/we need not be like Jesus and yet feel heroic we've pushed ourselves to the limit (after all, we are only human).

² The overriding theme/concern of this parable is the lavish nature of the king's forgiveness (v. 23 identifies the master as a king; who = God) and the nature of the forgiveness expected of those (now) in God's Kingdom through faith in the Saviour.

³ **a)** settling of accounts between a king + his servants; **b)** demand to repay huge debt or declare bankruptcy + sell family as slave; **c)** desperate plea for unexpected mercy [might he have know of the king's great mercifulness? – if so, what might it say of the servant?]; **d)** his debt is a "Bill Gates" kind of fortune; e) both involve inconceivable if not infinite amounts.

⁴ Initially it appears to be "justice" but the "twist" makes it clear that another issue is central.

⁵ The complete cancellation of the servant's enormous debt is beyond belief and would peak disciples' attention to the parable and lead them to wonder, "What is going on here?" = No disrespect to the king, but has he lost his royal crown?

⁶ **a)** sell the servant's family into slavery and throw away the key to the servant's cell; **b)** He is moved to compassion; **c)** The King bears the full loss, himself; d) God's forgiveness is undeserved, cost Him everything, involves giving up His rights

⁷ **a)** We stand with gaping mouths, wondering at His lavish mercy. **b)** We celebrate the servant's unbelievable good fortune

⁸ Might we be wishing he had not gotten off so easily? Would we rather he'd gotten his "come uppins" to the nth degree.?

⁹ Well, I can't help myself, I kind of fancy," **The King and I** – **can you guess why?** [I am the servant in Act 1]

¹⁰ Consider footnote #3, note the similarities, more importantly, the differences between the two scenes.

Q12 – Where’s the “Beef”?¹¹¹² [Note the behaviors of the main characters, especially of the first servant (now in a role similar to king’s). The additional servants are in the Act only to complete the picture / advance the story]

Q13 – What is the “Twist”?¹³ [Hints: Read verse 28. Apart from S2 – what did you expect would be the first thing S1 would do upon being released? Instead, he purposely, unhesitatingly searches out S2 and for what purpose?]

Q14 – What’s the “Point”?¹⁴ [Hint: What does S2 have every right to do? What does he have every reason not to do? What does this say about S2 about what he learned from the king’s inconceivably abundant mercy?]

Q15 – How do you now feel towards S1? / S2? How’s your pudding? (see fn #15 b) How would you title Act 2¹⁵
With which servant do you most identify in Act 2? Why? Can (how do) you identify with both servants in Act 2?
To this point, with whom do you or would you most like to identify (choose anyone!)? Please explain briefly?
Are you ready for Act 3?

Act 3 – Read Matt 18:28-31 (note compare to Acts 1 + 2) work on the 4 questions on your own

Q16 – What’s the setting – (who, what, when, where and why)

Q17 – Where’s the Beef? (the main issue or concern addressed)

Q18 – What is the “twist”? (the unexpected aspect of the story, what they would not think is true to life)

Q19 – What is the point? (where the rubber meets the road – but it is crucial we respond to the parable)

Q20 – Forgetting the king represents God — yeah, right: OK, I’ll try — what do you think of him (and S1) now?

Q21 – Why didn’t the king forgive him at least this one more time?¹⁶

Q22 - What do we learn about God and ourselves from this Act of the parable (and only this Act)?¹⁷

Q23 – most importantly – how can we apply what we’ve learned to our lives? (a good segue to **Prayer Time**)

Prayer time

¹¹ From here on S1 = 1st servant (who had the enormous debt); S2 = servant 2 (the fellow servant with a minor debt).

¹² In Act 2 the “beef” remains the nature of forgiveness – but here – seen in contrast to Act 1. (debt 2 ≈ few dollars)

¹³ **a**) I expected him to at least, **i**) throw a party and celebrate ‘till satan’s homeland froze over [I don’t capitalize his name] and **ii**) to vigorously seek out those who owe him a debt so he could cancel them (= others he could forgive). **b**) He does so in an effort to exact his unrelenting revenge on this humble, sincere servant (whose debt was at least payable).

¹⁴ **a**) he has every right to get justice from S2, BUT **b**) he has every reason (literally, millions of them) to show S2 mercy like the king **c**) he probably thinks the king is some kind of fool [so gullible], worse, he has learned / experienced little if anything about forgiveness/mercy – he may think it a weakness of the king he can manipulate and/or something he deserved **d**) this Act teaches us at least that this is NOT how God treats us (= our debts we owe) when we honestly seek His mercy -> we are NOT to go and do likewise (as the first servant does)

¹⁵ **Note:** This a very dangerous series of questions. They are questions which go to our [my] own hearts in the sense of how often do we [I] behave like the first servant [instead of the king]: having been shown immense mercy yet not willing +/- unable to show the same to others on a much lesser scale? If nothing else, being forgiven by God is the basis for our forgiving all other people all other sins. **We are to be forgiven forgivers.** This is to be fundamental to our relationships – or – we, ourselves, demonstrate we have not really been forgiven. **a**) If it were a real play, I’d be booing and throwing tomatoes at S1 and want to valiantly rescue S2. **b**) The proof lies in the pudding, as mom used to say. Our treatment of others reveals what we know of God’s forgiveness. At this point, I need to bow before God and confess my lack of forgiveness, worse, my unwillingness to forgive. I need a new recipe for pudding. How’s your pudding? **c**) title: how ‘bout “**Great Expectations**”

¹⁶ Without more complete information it is hard to say. So we need to be careful about arguing from silence (= weakest argument). An informed guess might be: a) he already has (v. 22) and/or b) it is an unnecessary detail, detracts from story

¹⁷ There is good news and bad news. The good news is God is just – the bad news is God is just. Either news, we are taught **i**) that there is justice, maybe delayed, but not delayed forever. In this world, we desperately need to be assured that there IS justice, delayed though it be. It is good news because it confirms there is order in the universe and there is purpose and meaning in our sufferings, trials and persecutions. **ii**) Don’t nobody gets away with nottin’. The good in this is God has forgiven us (we get away with nottin’ cause Jesus paid our debt in full). The bad in this is those who refused God’s offer of salvation get what they wanted – until they realize what they get ain’t so good. **iii**) The bad news is always Good News for those in Christ. By this I mean, God is unrelenting in turning “bad news” into “good news”. [trust me, I know, that I know, that I know – infinitely better, trust God and Romans 8:28]. Here, for example, the “bad news” motivates us to share the Good News. In addition to building our character, tough times make us more effective and passionate witnesses because we don’t want the “bad news” to become reality for the lost. [more good news – I am done with this line of thinking ;-)]