Jesus,

what do you mean?

***“I tell you, (forgive) not seven times, but seventy-seven times (or seventy times seven).”***

Or, “As we forgive our debtors. . .”

Matthew 18:21-35

The Words:

This is number four of the Jesus discourses in Matthew, and, as we saw last week, focuses upon humility. And forgiveness is where humility begins and ends. It begins in being forgiven, and ends in forgiving as we have been forgiven. In a world where all is of grace, it could be no other way, when you think about it. We have received “eternal passes” into God’s Kingdom Wonderland, with the stipula-tion that we truly desire to bring everyone we know with us!

The Challenge:

Given our fallen natures and ruthless pursuit of “what is mine,” forgiving does not come easy for us. We falter because of self-righteousness (we haven’t sinned THAT bad) or our desire for revenge, to the point that forgiveness seems to cost too much. We have, in fact, been wronged, and it just doesn’t seem right to “let someone off” with what looks like mere words.

The Principles: Forgiveness is love rooted in the soul.

Forgiveness is indispensable in the church. vv. 15-22

It is key in sustaining healthy relationships.

An unforgiving spirit is shown in anger and self-righteousness. vv. 23-30

It is a barometer of our standing in grace.

Forgiveness is expected / required of all in God’s Kingdom. vv. 31-35

It begins and ends in our relationship to God our Father.

The Application: Focus on Forgiveness

1. Beware of counterfeit forgivenesses.

Rationalization: “That’s just the way life is.”

Codependency: “He can’t help it.”

Denial: “What debt?”

Martyrdom: “After all I’ve forgiven you!”

Supersainthood: “She’s done horrible things. . . but I’m above it.”

Verbal forgiveness: “Grrrrrr. . . I’ve worked through all that. . . grrrr.”

Promissory Note: “I forgive you this time. But never again.”

2. Overcome forgiveness roadblocks.

Perfectionism: Your standards may be too high.

Victim mentality: You may have become bitter.

Self-justification: Your anger / rage seems appropriate and right.

Theological ignorance: Your god is too small, your jesus too pale.

3. Deal with what true forgiveness always involves:

Grief. Accepting that you have been wronged, rights violated.

Cost accounting: Measuring your sin with God’s yardstick of grace.

Relinquishing your right to revenge.

Resting: Laying judgment aside, reaching out to the offender.

Reconciling: Rebuilding the relationship in love.

Grace: Forgiveness is a river of love flowing from the heart of God.