

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Matthew 18:21-35**.
- B. "The World's Worst Prison."
- C. This is the third in a series of six sermons on the parables.
- D. Alcatraz was from 1933-63 one of the most escape-proof prisons in the world. But a worse place than a prison we put ourselves into by not forgiving others. Some, unfortunately live in a dungeon of an unforgiving spirit.

I. THE SETTING OF THE PARABLE (Mt. 18:1-20).

- A. The first lesson: **Humility** (18:1-14).

The one who is the greatest in the kingdom must be humble, learn to accept self, trust others, and be appreciative like a child (Jas. 4:6,10; Mt. 5:3; 18:1-4; Col. 3:12).

(Jas 4:6,10) But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." **10** Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

(Mt 5:3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Mt 18:1-4) At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

(Col 3:12) And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;
- B. The second lesson: **Be open and honest with one another** (18:15-20).

If anyone sins against us we are to go to him. If that doesn't work we may find recourse in two or three witnesses. Only as a last resort we should have to take it to the entire congregation. The "one another" phrase occurs 106 times out of 99 verses in the NT (Mt. 18:15-17; Rom. 14:10-12; 12:3; Heb. 10:24).

(Mt 18:15-17) "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

(Rom 14:10-12) But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God.

(Rom 12:3) For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

(Heb 10:24) and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,
- C. The third lesson: **Practice forgiveness** (18:21-35).

Jesus taught there is no limit to the number of times we are to forgive others. Anyone who forgives "70 times 7" is in the habit of forgiving and will not try to set limits (Mt. 18:21-22).

II. THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE (Mt. 13:21-35).

- A. The servant owed a debt that he could never repay. Yet because of the compassion and mercy of the king he was forgiven his debt. But there was something wrong with the forgiven servant's heart.
- B. Christ proceeds to teach about three levels of forgiveness: receiving, experiencing, and sharing.
- C. First, **receiving forgiveness**:
 - 1. The king's forgiveness was not cheap, it cost a great deal; the servant was bankrupt.
 - 2. The price of our salvation is very high; the life's blood of God's Son (Ac. 20:28; Eph. 5:25;

Rom. 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13.

(Ac 20:28) "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

(Eph 5:25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;

(Rom 5:9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

(Eph 1:7) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace,

(Eph 2:13) But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

D. Second, experiencing forgiveness:

1. Because we have been forgiven, we are a free people, not living as if still in prison.

2. We initially experience forgiveness when we become a Xian (Ac. 2:38; 22:16).

3. Forgiveness is to be experienced daily (1Jn. 1:7,9; Col. 1:14).

(1Jn 1:7,9) ...but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(Col 1:14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

E. Third, sharing forgiveness:

1. We forgive others because we see our real need for forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

(Eph 4:32) And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

(Col 3:13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

2. The parable teaches that those who refuse to share forgiveness will not be forgiven themselves (Mt. 6:15).

"But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

F. Let us always live in the realm of mercy and not justice.

IV. LIVING THE PARABLE.

A. An unforgiving heart always experiences torment. Instead of loving and caring many use their energy for hating and they waste their energy on enemies they cannot fight.

B. Take inventory of your heart:

1. Have you received forgiveness?... If not, then you need to become a Xian!

2. Have you experienced forgiveness?... If not, they you need to live a faithful life!

3. Are you sharing forgiveness?... If not, you will not be forgiven by God.

C. Resentment and grudges put people into prison. Freedom only comes when they learn to show mercy and forgive from the heart.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

A. The parable has a window and a mirror:

1. The **window** (to see God) is to see how great His forgiveness is.

2. The **mirror** (to see ourselves) is to realize how much we have been forgiven, and how we need to forgive others.

B. May we learn to practice forgiveness in our lives and not live in the prison of an unforgiving spirit.

C. Plan of salvation for non-Xians, erring Xians.