

Bible Class The Unforgiving Servant**Matthew 18:23-25****21st November '24****Contribution to Bro Russel's Introduction**

The parable begins... The Kingdom of heaven is likened or compared to ...

Many people when they are asked what is the Kingdom of heaven going to be like, they will say, well, it is in heaven and The Apostle Peter will welcome us through the gates, and there we will meet all our family and friends, and it will be happiness for ever! Of course such a response we feel sad about because the Bible plainly teaches the Kingdom OF heaven is not IN heaven but on earth, promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the faithful, where the Lord Jesus will return to the earth even the same way as he left, to rule on the throne of his father David, in Jerusalem.

However, when those who believe this, and have been baptised, are asked the same question – what is the Kingdom of heaven likened to... they will normally reply, well, the Kingdom will be in the future, and will be established in Jerusalem, and will grow to cover the whole earth, and the law will go forth from Zion, with the faithful ruling with Jesus in peace and righteousness. This is of course true, but is not answering the question!

Jesus said the Kingdom of heaven IS likened to... and he described this servant who was forgiven a huge debt, but then who failed to forgive a tiny debt with someone else

This seems a strange description of the Kingdom! A Kingdom with people grabbing others by the throat, and people being thrown into prison, people being described as wicked servants! Oh! Is this what the Kingdom will be like??

We can see an element of confusion arising here, what can this mean? How can there be such a carry on in the Kingdom of God? Will

people be allowed to build up such massive debts in the Kingdom? Will prisons even exist? Will violence be commonplace? No, No and No.

So returning to the question what is the Kingdom of heaven likened to... Jesus is actually comparing the Kingdom of heaven not to a time in the future – but the current time – the present day. His present day – and our present day. What IS the Kingdom of heaven like – not WILL BE like.

This is an important point.

The Kingdom of heaven is also described by the other Gospel writers as the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God has already existed as we know, ...1 Chronicles 28:5: *he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel*. See also 2 Chronicles 13:8: The Kingdom of God was the nation of Israel, in the promised land, with Jerusalem as its capital, with The Lord God as supreme ruler and lawgiver. It was based on Heavenly principles, and was The Kingdom of Heaven.

However after the disintegration of the Kingdom, because of corruption, the Lord God withdrew His glory step by step. The Jewish Commonwealth continued getting smaller and smaller, until finally God sent His own Son. The Lord Jesus represented all that was good and right and true, and was the visible manifestation of the Kingdom of God, he remained in the end, the only representation of the Kingdom of God. This is why John the Baptist said: Matthew 3:2 *Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. 4:17: *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. 11:12: *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*. Luke 16:16: *The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man press into it*.

The vineyard was taken from those who killed the owner's son, and given unto others. The Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven, that which is ruled by Heavenly principles was no longer the domain of the Jews, but Gentiles were freely invited.

The Ecclesia - ruled by Christ as the Head -is the Kingdom of heaven at this present time, a Kingdom in waiting, a Kingdom with no dominion as such except the hearts and minds of faithful members. This understanding can be gleaned from the teachings of the Apostles in the following passages:

- Hebrews 3:1: *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;*
- Ephesians 2:6: *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*
- Hebrews 11:16: *But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*
- Philippians 3:20: *For our citizenship [conversation in KJV] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*
- 2 Corinthians 5:1: *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*
- Ephesians 2:19: *Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;*
- Colossians 1:5: *For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;*

The Kingdom of Heaven then, which Jesus described was not the Jewish nation, nor was he describing the Kingdom of God which is yet to be established on earth, but the those who are Hebrews, citizens of the Kingdom-in waiting, who have been exiled from society, and

who are strangers in a strange land, because they are members of the Ecclesia, Those Called Out, Members of Christ Jesus.

Remembering this, it is easy to then understand why Jesus describes the Kingdom of heaven like a grain of mustard seed, treasure hid in the field, yeast which swiftly grows, a merchant seeking pearls, a fishing net and so on.

In this case, Jesus is touching upon the Heavenly Rules which must be kept, and which are abandoned by Earthly kingdoms. Matthew 18 contains rules which describe the need for humility, deep consideration for others, great effort not to offend others, the need for repentance and contrition, and finally in this last parable the need to forgive, even as we have been forgiven.

The ridiculous contrast is made in the parable of the size of the two debts. The one the man owed was so massive, it was like the debt of a small nation! But the amount of money he was owed by someone else was just very small, it was barely worth noticing.

This contrast is deliberate to remind the believers, not to think of themselves too highly. Every member of the Kingdom of heaven is invited in by grace and is not worthy to enter, and does not deserve it by right. Even when called, and chosen and faithful each member can tragically fall in a spectacular way at times, and be forgiven again, despite treading underfoot the blood of Christ, but when contrite and repentant will have that huge debt, be made of no account, be forgiven, and have their sins blotted out. But still they then go and rack up another debt, and then again. So why is it in human nature that despite such mercy, shown continually, do the members of the heavenly calling find it hard to forgive a minor slight, and a small offence, and make a man an offender for a word? To hold a grudge, and become wary of another because oh dear we have been hurt? How many times can we grieve the Holy Spirit through our own crass stupidity and foolish ways, yet our God and Father, the King in Heaven is ready to forgive when His Son intercedes for us when we

plead for forgiveness 1 John 1:9: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

How wicked then are members of the Kingdom of Heaven when they do not show the same kindness and love which has been shown them.

So Jesus concludes a terrible punishment of condemnation awaits those wicked: 35: *likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

Brother Terry