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[www.orthodoxphotos.com](http://www.orthodoxphotos.com) - "The sermon on the mount"

## Lesson Material

### SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR THE SERVANT

As we commence our journey through Lent, we need to focus our eyes on the amazing sacrifice and suffering which our Lord Jesus Christ endured. Because of His mercy, He suffered for us – to the extent of death - to free us from the bonds of sin. His mercy therefore is a demonstration of His amazing and infinite love for us.

As servants are we as devoted in our service to Christ as we would like (or better still as Christ would like us to be)? Are we merciful in our treatment of others, and are we demonstrating our love for others and our children by our actions towards them in the same way Christ did for us?

If you find yourself with a hardened or judgmental attitude towards others, remember..

- a. That those forgiven most are capable of loving Jesus more
- b. We need to reflect daily on our own spiritual condition

For more on spiritual preparation, download and listen to the sermon "What am I missing" by Fr Anthony Messeh from:

<http://www.orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/what-am-i-missing>

### FOCUS ACTIVITY

Write the following question on the board, or pose the following question to the Students:

"What is the extent of God's mercy towards you. Do you think His forgiveness of our sins is conditional?"

Ask the students to reflect on this question for a few minutes, whilst playing one of the following You-Tube videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENWL5Dpvx80&NR=1&feature=fvwp>

OR

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpR5q-XxaAI&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpR5q-XxaAI&feature=player_embedded)

After the video open up a discussion as to whether there is a limit or boundary to God's mercy towards us. Guide the discussion to the need to be merciful from a Christian context, and the answers as found in the Lord's Prayer to forgive us our sins, as we forgive others.

## LESSON

Here is a guideline to why and how we ought to be merciful. We should look at Christ's examples and His teachings about the requirement to be merciful. The students will need to see that as the Lord was first merciful, so we ought to be. He has commanded us to be merciful, shown us how to do so and then also promised us rewards for showing mercy!

1. Blessed are the merciful      Matt. 5:7
2. Therefore be merciful      Luke 6:36
3. Give to whoever asks      Matt. 5:42
4. The reward of mercy      Matt. 10:40-42

Discuss the difficulty of following the words of our Lord in our day to day lives but always remind them of the rewards they will have later in life.

### *Story*

There was once a monk that lived a very lazy lifestyle, he always came late for prayers and any time there was work to be done he would conveniently disappear. He'd never help out in the kitchen, library or gardens and on the few occasions he did it was for a very short period of time and so the monk was always known for his extreme laziness.

After many years the monk fell ill and the other monks knew that his time to leave this world had arrived. So they were all gathered around him as were the monks custom and whilst standing around him one monk asked how he felt.

The monks reply was that he was extremely happy. So they asked him why? His reply was that he was sure that he was about to enter the eternal life. So the other monks questioned him asking how he could be so sure, as he led a very lazy life which did warrant someone to be very confident in entering heaven.

He replied that he agreed that he had led a very lazy life and that usually this would not warrant confidence in entering heaven, however he was sure of one thing; and that was all the days of his life he practiced one very strict rule on himself and that was he never allowed himself to judge anybody, he never cast a discerning eye on anyone else's actions and he never thought that he was better than any one of his brothers. Therefore by being true to this custom he knew that our Lord would also be true in his promises as he said in Luke 6:37 *Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

Therefore the monk was confident that when he stood before our Lord Jesus Christ in the final days he would not be judged.

### **PARABLES OF FORGIVENESS & BEING NON-JUDGMENTAL INCLUDE:**

- (1) The Wicked servant (Mt 18:21-35)
- (2) The Pharisees and the Publican (LUKE 18:9-14)

### **THE WICKED & UNFORGIVING SERVANT (Matt 18:21-35):**

*"...Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow*

*servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matt. 18:32-35)*

Some points to note from this parable are:

We need to forgive negligible amounts, and  
be forgiven large amounts

- 6,000 denarii = one talent.
- Remembering that a denarius was a day's normal wage, the servant owed something like 60,000,000 denarii.
- Using the rate of say \$50 as one day's wage, the amount would be \$3,000,000,000 (3 billion dollars)

Jesus used this illustration to reveal God's attitude towards our sins and how absurd it is to think that we can pay it back ourselves. But also for another reason. One hundred denari was about \$5000, and the contrast between these two numbers reveals the attitude that Jesus demands we take on considering our indebtedness to God compared to others indebtedness to us. It can be humiliating to consider.

The mercy of the king goes beyond the actual request:

- 1) The request was for patience to pay the debt
  - 2) Yet the king was willing to forgive the debt entirely!
- a. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." Mt 18:35

"Prompted by gratitude the forgiven sinner must always yearn to forgive whoever has trespassed against him". Jesus in the beatitudes names mercy as one of the primary attributes of God and His followers: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." You could say it operates by a cause-and-effect principle: Show mercy and you will obtain mercy.

We can only obtain the forgiveness of sins which God offers us if we receive it with the right attitude. Jesus advocates the prayer, "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*" Mt 6:12. The wicked servant in the parable represents the nominal Christian who though he begs forgiveness from God doesn't have an application oriented faith and so ultimately is not saved. Though he may have seen sincere, yet by his behaviour it appears that he considered his debt and the master's forgiveness to be trivial. There are those who may pray a prayer for salvation, but who lack serious conviction of sin and don't consider the implications of being forgiven, not receiving it with true humility and conviction. These are not saved.

Though salvation is a free gift, it is not unconditional. It is conditioned upon faith in Christ. Putting our faith in the atoning work of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins requires that we view ourselves as truly in debt to God. We cannot receive Christ without true conviction of sin. We cannot receive him with the attitude: "*I'm not really all that bad a person, but whatever trivial things you have against me, forgive me for these.*"

A person's behaviour reveals whether he has received Christ with a proper attitude.

*"This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother." 1John 3:10*

But those who don't forgive others who sin against them and ask for forgiveness, reveal that they haven't really accepted the fact of the depth of their own sinfulness against God and the extent to which God had supposedly forgiven them. They hadn't received the word in humility. But rather they are like those Peter writes about:

*If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud." 2Pet 2:20-22*

There are those who know about the gospel, they understand it, but they haven't experienced it or received it personally. They know about God, and through that knowledge experience some short term benefits. But without having established a personal relationship with God, such knowledge simply increased their level of accountability on judgement day.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

We can see that Lord taught mercy and the importance of it in the life of a Christian. The reason for this command was not just for the sake of our brothers and sisters but also for the health of our spirits within us. If we harbour anger and resentment within us it will only distance us from God and make us into bitter unpleasant people, and who wants to befriend someone with those principles. Rather our Lord teaches us to show mercy, even if it means we need to forgive our brother who sins against us time and again. WHY? So that we also may be shown mercy, not only by others but by our Merciful Lord now and in the day of judgment.

The more self-loving and proud a man is, the more sensitive he becomes to the faults of others. If we are victims of this, we will develop resentment, which if kept in the heart without repentance may gradually become spite. Spite, according to St. John of the Ladder, is the "rust of the soul, worm of the mind, contempt of prayers, alienation of love ... ceaseless sin." It is very hard to fight once it becomes rooted within oneself.

In another of his counsels, St. John of the Ladder writes, "Recollection of the sufferings of Jesus will heal spitefulness, which will be reproached by His goodness." Further on, he says, "When after a long good fight you are not able to remove this thorn, then at least in your words repent and humble yourself before the one whom you are angry with, so that you become ashamed of your sustained hypocrisy and able to love this one perfectly."

Whoever forces himself to forgive his neighbors' wrong, as a reward for this effort, he will receive the gift of genuine Christian love which our Holy Fathers called the Queen of Virtues.

## **FOCUS ON GOD'S FORGIVENESS TO YOU...**

This is where the unmerciful servant went wrong. Any wrong our neighbours may inflict on us is **negligible** compared to our debt to God; because as James says just one sin makes us guilty of all sins: **Jam 2:10**; and the wages of sin is spiritual death, separation from God – **Rom 6:23; Isa 59:1-2**. Therefore if we are all punishable of spiritual death (but for our Lord's mercy), what is that compared to an unkind remark or small wrong which our neighbour may cause us.

## **CONCLUSION**

1. We are all God's debtors - **Mt 18:23**; cf. **Ro 3:23**
2. None are able to pay what is owed - **Mt 18:25**
3. But by Christ's atoning sacrifice, the debt is paid - **Mt 18:27**; cf. **Mt 20:28**
4. Only those who are willing to forgive others can be assured that they are indeed forgiven - **Mt 18:35**; cf. **Mt 6:14-15**
5. It should be easy to forgive others, for what we owe God is infinitely more than what others owe us - **Mt 18:32,33**
6. The unforgiving person is destined for everlasting punishment!  
**Mt 18:34,35; Rom 1:31**

**May our Lord God open up our heart and mind to accept others in a simple and non-judgmental way, and may He continue to show His mercy by His continual forgiveness of our never ending sins.**

## **Additional Stories:**

1. The story of Anba Abraam and the three friends who tried to trick him out of some money by pretending one of them died, and when one of them actually died he was merciful on them and still gave them the money.
2. The story of St Macarius who was accused of committing adultery and forced to take care of the pregnant girl, and when the time of labour came and the girl was in so much pain she admitted her lies and asked the saint to pray for her, which he did and only then was the girl able to give birth.
3. St Bishoy was the only one of a group of monks who stopped to carry the old man, who he later found out to be our Lord.