

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 18:21-35

Year A - Proper 19, Text: Matthew 18:21-35
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The focus of this final section of Matthew 18 is the forgiveness that the disciples are to manifest toward fellow disciples who sin against them. Embedded in this section is the parable of the unforgiving servant. In this parable, Jesus warns that His heavenly Father will give those who do not forgive the same treatment as that given to the unmerciful servant.

Verses 18:21-22: Peter asks how often forgiveness is to be granted. Jesus answers that it is to be given without limit. Jesus' brothers and sisters are to forgive others for what they are and to focus on helping them become what Jesus wants them to be.

“Seventy times seven”: The Greek text in Matthew corresponds to the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Genesis 4:24. There is possibly an allusion in v. 22, by contrast, to the limitless vengeance of Lamech. However, what is demanded of Jesus' disciples is limitless forgiveness.

Verse 18:23: This verse sets the stage for the parable that follows.

Verse 18:24: The “ten thousand talents” referred to is a huge amount. In the Gospels, the term talent is referred to only here and in Matthew 25:14–30. The talent was a unit of coinage of high but varying value depending on the metal from which it was made (gold, silver, copper) and its place of origin.

Verse 18:25: Because the debtor has no way of repaying what he owes the king, he and his wife, children, and property are to be sold in payment for the debt.

Verse 18:26: The debtor makes an empty promise — given the size of the debt.

Verse 18:27: The debtor's master has pity on him, releases him, and forgives him the debt.

Verses 18:28–30: The debtor who has been forgiven so much now goes out and brutally demands that a fellow slave repay him a debt that amounted to a paltry

sum — a hundred denarii. A denarius was the normal daily wage paid to a laborer. The difference between the two amounts is enormous and points to the absurdity of the conduct of Christians who have received the great forgiveness of God and yet refuse to forgive the relatively minor offenses done to them by others.

Verse 18:31: The victim's fellow slaves see what has taken place and report the matter to their lord.

Verses 18:32–34: The lord then rebukes the one who had owed him so much, and hands him over to be tortured until he repays the entire big debt (verses 32–34). Since the debt is so great as to be unpayable, the punishment will be endless.

Verse 18:35: The punch line surfaces in this verse. The Father's forgiveness, already given, will be withdrawn at the Final Judgment from those who have not imitated God's forgiveness by forgiving others.

