**Asking for Mercy**

Based on [Matthew 18:21-35](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt18.21-35)

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“And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Jesus tells of a man who owes an unpayable debt. And he begs his debtor to have mercy upon him so that he can have time to pay it off. And the debtor, the king, does not give him more time. Instead, the king forgives the debt all together. But when the man himself is asked for mercy, he refuses to give it. He won’t forgive this small debt, even though he was forgiven a much larger one.

The forgiven man begged the king for mercy, but he didn’t really believe in mercy...not from the heart. If he believed in mercy, he would have shown it when he was asked. He didn’t really believe in mercy; but he pretended to believe in it when it suited him. He pretended that this cardinal virtue of the christian life was just an empty word. He found it useful to say, because other people believe in it. He used it with the king because he hoped that the king believed this fiction, this mercy. But he didn’t.

There’s a video clip someone uploaded to YouTube years back already. There was a conference panel of spiritual guru’s, including among others an anglican bishop, an evangelical pastor, and a New Age spiritualist author named Deepak Chopra. Deepak had explained that all belief is really a just mask or a way to cover up one’s own insecurity. So if you believe in God, or Jesus Christ, or Karma, or any other spiritual “truth”, really you are just posturing. You don’t really believe it, because beliefs aren’t real...they are just useful therapy...to help you cope with some other reality you aren’t courageous enough to face. Truly enlightened people are aware of this spiritual truth. And Deepak Chopra is there to enlighten them.

...A man from the audience approaches the microphone to ask a question. “My question is for Deepak and the Bishop. You said that all belief is a cover up for insecurity...right?” ‘Yes’ “D’you believe that?” ‘Yes’... Thank you.” And the man returns to his seat. The crowd erupts in laughter and applause.

You see, you can’t really believe that all belief is only a cover for insecurity. You can say it, but you can’t believe it. You can’t believe that all beliefs are lies, because that is itself a belief. What it amounts to, is that Deepak Chopra wants everyone else to believe that their beliefs are invalid, while believing his own beliefs are true. We call that hypocrisy.

Jesus called the pharisees hypocrites because they would pull an ox out of a well on the sabbath, but they wouldn’t let him heal the sick. They were hypocrites because they thought they were the only ones who could break the sabbath laws. Deepak thought he was the only one who had a right to have beliefs.

And evidently, the forgiven man in the parable thought he was the only one who should receive mercy. But that is not precisely the truth. Closer to the truth is to say that he didn’t really believe in mercy, but he used the word when it suited him. Just like Deepak with belief; and the pharisees with the Sabbath.

And just like we are, and must not be, with forgiveness. “I believe in the forgiveness of sins”. You can say that, as you do every Sunday in church. But here’s the thing, you cannot believe in the forgiveness of sins for yourself, but deny that forgiveness to others.

When we say “I believe in the forgiveness of sins” we are believing in a real thing. This thing is the reality that there is a force, the righteous wrath of God against sin, a wrath that cannot, should not, and will not tolerate evil forever. And that evil is within you, and every other son or daughter of adam and eve.

But we believe that Jesus Christ took our sin upon himself and crucified it. We believe that he did this, not just for you or me, but for all people. Just as the sabbath was for all people, forgiveness and mercy are for all people. The gospel is not parochial or private. The gospel says that one died for all, therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. You cannot really believe the gospel if you believe that forgiveness is only for you but not other people, because there is no gospel except the one that is founded upon Christ, and that gospel is universal for all people.

It may very well be that someone owes you a debt and doesn’t ask for mercy. Someone sins against you and doesn’t repent. What about that?

I’ll give you this illustration. There’s canadian legislation being proposed now that certain social benefits should be applied to low income people even if they don’t file their taxes. The idea is that Canada Revenue knows what you made before you file anyway, and many low income people are denied benefits intended for them simply because they don’t “file” their taxes. It amazed me, when I found out some years ago, that parents receive Child Care Benefits from the government automatically without asking, once you file your taxes. Parent’s don’t even have to ask. The new legislation means that parents don’t even have to prove their poverty. What’s the difference? Well, once upon a time if you needed help you had to say why you needed it and ask...and that requires some humility. Now, in order to receive social benefits you didn’t earn, you don’t have to prove how you qualify for it, say that you need it, nor have to have the humility to ask for it.

I bring this up not to compare this with God’s forgiveness, but to contrast. The gospel of the modern welfare state seems to be that you have a right to social benefits even without having to ask for them or prove why you qualify for them. But it is clear in this parable and throughout the Bible, forgiveness was won for all and is available to all, but you do have to ask for it. You do have to be able to explain how it is you think you qualify for it. Having to ask is not a work, or does not make you earn the benefit. You have to be humble to ask, but if you are a dependant, you should be humble anyway. It simply acknowledges the reality of the relationship between benefactor and beneficiary. You don’t deserve the benefit, aren’t entitled to it by nature, but are given it by grace alone.

And that’s the same thing with the grace of God distributed in the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Some believe that since Jesus died for all people that all people should be admitted to the Lord’s Supper simply because they are human. But in the parable, the king didn’t seek out the man to tell him his debt was forgiven. The king sought the man out to have him sold, with his wife and children and all he had, and payment to be made. That’s no small issue. If the king in the parable is figured to be God, God did not go out first to forgive the debts of those who don’t ask. He went out to collect. It is when the man asked for mercy that the king forgave it. If that hadn’t happened, the king would have sold him.

Jesus says, ask and ye shall receive. So, because we have no delusions about our own worthiness, we confess, we ask, we beg for mercy from God. Forgiveness is real and it has been won by Christ for all; and is received by those who ask for it, which is to say by those who have faith. Like a helpless dependant baby who cries for his mother, so we helplessly cry for God.

Therefore, knowing that you are a poor miserable sinner and utterly dependent upon mercy that our God, in Christ is eager to give...go in peace, your faith has received mercy.