**The Formative and Summative Assessment of the King**

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

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Assessment is a central part of Education. Tests, quizzes and report cards are a way to measure and provide feedback on where a student is at in their education. Formative Assessment is a small, oftentimes very informal way to measure where a student is at in order to advance their learning. This is to judge, but it is to judge in order to improve. Formative assessment is like when God disciplines the Christian. Hebrews says, “**For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastizes every son whom he receives.**” The Christian learns from the threats and punishments of God’s law of his own weakness, and how to draw closer to Christ.

There are two kinds of assessment. “Formative assessment” is assessing a student in order to improve his learning. “Summative Assessment”, however, is a final determination of what has been learned before moving on. There will be no more instruction on the matter. There will be no more discipline; only summation. No more learning from mistakes, you either pass or fail.

Jesus’ first coming was like a formative assessment of mankind; he came to teach us what we need to know and believe for eternal life. His second coming will be a summative assessment. He will judge, not to teach, but to rank and sort the sheep from the goats.

1) Before the summative judgment, first Jesus came to formatively assess our sins, and helping us to learn the great cost as well as the worthiness of forgiveness. Jesus Christ forgives our sins, and the sins of the whole world, so that we will forgive others. He went willingly to the cross to pay for the sins of each and every human being that ever lived. In that spirit, the angels proclaimed peace on earth at his birth. Just as Adam brought sin and death into the world; Jesus Christ brought forgiveness and life. Why did he do this? “What is man that he is mindful of him?” Jesus did this in his love;---in his compassion for the world and his obedience to the plan of His Father.

Jesus died to forgive your sins by the blood of his cross. He paid a ransom to satisfy the Law’s demand upon your souls. But he also died to teach you something. When you consider the extent of Christ’s compassion for you, how he suffered all things to spare you eternal punishment and freely give you the kingdom of heaven...even you, a poor miserable sinner...**It ought to provoke in you a sense of gratitude, and a compassion borne of compassion.** In short, Jesus forgave us our sins so that we can learn both in the mind and in the heart, to forgive one another. His cross motivates us to take up our crosses, by which christ forms us after his image and example.

Peter asks, Jesus “**How many times should my brother sin and I forgive him, seven times?**” Lets just pause here a moment and consider that during Jesus earthly ministry, he is teaching his disciples like Peter. For three years, from his baptism to his ascension, they are his students and the land of Israel his classroom. He does not call them because they already know everything. He calls them as an invitation to follow him, and learn from him. “**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly at heart and you will find rest for your souls**.”

Peter asks, “**How often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times**.” See, Peter had the wrong idea. Jesus assessed Peter’s conclusion, corrected it and provided formative feedback. I say formative because remember, while disciples are on earth, every assessment God makes is not for your condemnation, but for your learning. It is not for punishment, but for discipline. Jesus tells Peter he got it wrong, not to condemn him, but so Peter can learn the right answer before the day of summative assessment.

Jesus then tells a Parable about a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. You can see how “settle accounts” compares to a summative assessment. When he began to settle, one servant who owed him 10,000 talents begged for more time to pay off the debt. Now, this is somewhat dishonest. 10,000 talents is an outrageous debt. He’s asking for more time to pay it off...but **really he’s just trying to delay the final collection, buy more time just to have it**. It’s interesting that the servant doesn’t ask for forgiveness, only to delay collection. But the king has compassion on the servant, and forgives the debt entirely.

***This part of the parable figures to Jesus’ first coming.***  He came to settle accounts, and found a world that could not ever possibly repay what it owed. The righteousness and longsuffering of God had been presumed upon by mankind and abused beyond measure. But Jesus is gentle and lowly at heart. He wanted to forgive the enormous debt, and so he did. He payed the blood price that the law demanded, and only his blood was worthy of such a debt. Like the king in the parable, Jesus forgave the world, but at the same, like the king, it is a loss that he had to take upon himself.

Then the king releases the servant. *This figures with the time of the church, the millenium, the age of the saints--the present time, the latter days.*  This is the time we live in right now, having knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, we are expected to forgive others. But in the parable, after the king releases him, the servant goes and demands immediate and full repayment of a debt he is owed. The man pleads him for patience, but the servant refuses and has him put in debtors prison. This compares to the christians and the churches who refuse to forgive those who ask for mercy.

Finally, the king hears word about the actions of the servant. The king judges him wicked, based on his refusal to forgive after himself being forgiven such a huge debt. The king throws him in prison until he should pay the debt...which, given such an amount will be literally forever. This figures with the second coming of Jesus, who will come in justice to judge the living and the dead. And those who have forgiven their brother from the heart will enter eternal life; and those who have refused to forgive will enter eternal judgment.

Two lessons are here for us today. First, we live in a time of formative assessment...God is sending us crosses for our own good, so that we may learn from them. The first coming of Jesus was to absorb the debt of humanity himself by suffering and dying on the cross. This is also for our own formative assessment. We are to judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life, and turn to christ who has absorbed our debt and forgives us freely. With the knowledge of so great a gift, we are to pay it forward, not out of fear, but out of love, because God so loved us. We are to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Second, this forgiveness is reflective. It is only when we believe our forgiveness, will we be enabled to forgive others. The love to forgive comes from the faith in the forgiveness of Christ. Fix your eyes on him so that, in the day of the summative judgment, you may rejoice that it is not your judge, but your redeemer who draws near.