

Our plan is to study the parable of the Unforgiving Servant. We will read together from Matthew 18:21–35.

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2018:21-35&version=NASB>

I did not compose a formal outline, but here are some notes I jotted down in my study, collected here for your perusal:

1. 10,000 talents ~ = 150,000 years wages of a laborer (a mark today that would be measured in billions!) — that is an astronomical amount that stresses un-repayability.
2. The “Death of the King” — servant has to do nothing more than ask for grace to get grace. And he does not get it by the extravagant promise to repay — the king cancels the debt *for reasons entirely internal to himself*.
3. But the servant believes the master is actually responding to his ridiculous offer of repayment. The king, however, has wiped the debt and forgets it ever existed. *The king was willing to end his old life of bookkeeping and the servant was not.*
4. This picture of the servant’s pitilessness is a cardboard figure of wickedness / a comic book villain of sorts. But he is exactly what everybody else in the world is, an average citizen unwilling to face death in any way.
5. Jesus is going to solve the world’s problems by dying. What he tells us in this parable, therefore, is that unless we too are willing to see our own death as the one thing necessary to our salvation – unless we can, unlike the unforgiving servant, die to the flimsy accounts by which we have justified our lives – we will never be able to enjoy the resurrection.
6. “I died for you, for Christ’s sake!” he says; “but you were so busy making plans for your stupid life, you never even noticed.”
7. None of our debts – none of our sins, none of our trespasses, none of our errors – will ever be an obstacle to the grace that raises the dead. At the most, they will be the measure of our death, and as soon as we die, they too will be dead, because our Lord the King has already died to them. But if we refuse to die – and in particular, if we insist on binding others’ debts upon them in the name of our own right to life – we will, by not letting grace have its way through us, cut ourselves off from ever knowing the joy of grace in us.
8. In heaven, there are only forgiven sinners. There are no good guys, no upright, successful types who, by mark of their own integrity, have been accepted into the great country club in the sky. There are only failures, only those who have accepted their deaths in their sins and who have been raised up by the King who himself died that they might live. But in hell, too, there are only forgiven sinners. Jesus on the cross does not sort out certain exceptionally uncooperative parties and cut them off from the pardon of his death. He forgives the badness of even the worst of us, willy-nilly; and he never takes back that forgiveness, not even at the bottom of the bottomless pit.
9. The sole difference, therefore, between hell and heaven is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in hell it is rejected and blocked. In heaven, the death of the king is welcomed and becomes the doorway to new life in the resurrection. In hell, the old life of the bookkeeping world is insisted on and becomes, forever, the pointless torture it always was. There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to withhold pardon from others. The only thing that can keep us out of the joy of the resurrection is to join the unforgiving servant in his refusal to die.