

Matthew 18 Commentary - C H Spurgeon

PREVIOUS

NEXT

MATTHEW 18:1-5 THE KING ARRANGES RANK IN HIS KINGDOM

Matthew 18:1. AT the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

He spoke of his abasement, they thought of their own advancement; and that "at the same time." How different at the same moment the Teacher and the disciples! The idea of greatness, and of more or less of it for each one, was interwoven with their notion of a kingdom, even though it might be "the kingdom of heaven." They came unto Jesus; but how could they have the hardihood to ask their lowly Lord a question so manifestly alien to his thought and spirit? It showed their trustfulness, but also displayed their folly.

Matthew 18:2. And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.

He did not answer them with words alone, but made his teaching more impressive by an act. He "called a little child unto him." The child came at once, and Jesus "set him in the midst of them." That the child came at his call, and was willingly placed where Jesus wished, a evidence of a sweetness of manner on the part of our Lord. Surely there was a smile on his face when he bade the little one come unto him; and there must have been a charming gentleness in the manner in which he placed the child in the center of the twelve, as his little model. Let us see Jesus and the little child, and the twelve apostles grouped around the two central figures. Thus may the whole church gather to study Jesus, and the childlike character.

Matthew 18:3. And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The apostles were converted in one sense, but even they needed a further conversion. They needed to be converted from self-seeking to humbleness and content. A little child has no ambitious dreams; he is satisfied with little things; he trusts; he aims not at greatness; he yields to command. There is no entering into the kingdom of heaven but by descending from fancied greatness to real lowliness of mind, and becoming as little children. To rise to the greatness of grace, we must go down to the littleness, the simplicity, and the trustfulness of childhood. Since this was the rule for apostles, we may depend upon it we cannot enter the kingdom in any less humbling manner. This truth is verified by our Lord's solemnly attesting word, "Verily I say unto you."

Matthew 18:4. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

In the kingdom of heaven the least is the greatest. The most humble is the most exalted. He that will fulfill the lowest offices for the brethren shall be highest in their esteem. We have need to use endeavors to make ourselves truly lowly in mind; and if, through almighty grace, we succeed in it, we shall take high degrees in the school of love. What a kingdom is this, in which every man ascends by willingly going down!

It is wisdom for a man to humble himself, for thus he will escape the necessity of being humbled. Children do not try to be humble, but they are so; and the same is the case with really gracious persons. The imitation of humility is sickening; the reality is attractive. May grace work it in us!

Matthew 18:5. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

It is no small thing to be able to appreciate humble and lowly characters. To receive one childlike believer in Christ's name is to receive Christ. To delight in a lowly, trustful character is to delight in Christ. If we count it a joy to do service to such persons, we may

be sure that we are therein serving our Lord. Those who receive little ones in Christ's name will grow like them, and so in another way will receive Christ into their own souls.

MATTHEW 18:6-14 OUR KING'S WARNING AGAINST OFFENSES, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHICH INJURE THE LITTLE ONES 6.

Matthew 18:6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

To bless a little one is to entertain the Savior himself. To set one's self to pervert the simple, or to molest the humble, will be the sure way to a tremble doom. Little ones which believe in Jesus are specially under his guardian care, and only the desperately malicious will attack them, or seek to make them stumble. Such an evil person will gain nothing, even should he win the easy victory he looks for: he will, on the contrary, be preparing for himself a terrible retribution. It were better for him that the biggest of milestone, such as would be used in a mill worked by an ass, were hanged about his neck, and that he, himself, were then hurled overboard, and drowned in the depth of the sea. He will surely, sink infamously, sink never to rise again.

The haters of the humble are among the worst of men, for their enmity is unprovoked. They may hope to rise by oppressing or duping the simplehearted; but such conduct will prove their certain destruction sooner or later. It is the lowly Lord of the lowly who pronounces this condemnation; and he is soon to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Matthew 18:7. Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!

It is a sad world because of stumbling-block. This is the great misery of every age. Occasions for falling into sin are terribly many; and from the formation of society it seems as if it must be so. "It must needs be that offenses come." While man is man, his surroundings will be trying, and his fellow-men will too often become occasions of evil to him. This brings woe unto the world; but the center of that woe will be with the guilty cause of the stumbling, be that stumbling what it may. Those who try to be the greatest are great causers of offenses: the humble are the least likely to make others stumble. Woe, therefore, is the sure heritage of the proud; for he is that man by whom the offense cometh.

Matthew 18:8, 9. Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Here our Lord repeats a passage from the Sermon on the Mount. (Chapter 5:29, 30.) Why should he not? Great lessons need to be often taught; especially lessons which involve painful self-denial. It is well when at the close of a man's ministry he can preach the same sermon as at the beginning. Some in these days change continually; Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

Temptations and incitements to sin are so dangerous that, if we find them in ourselves, we must at any cost be rid of the causes of them. If escape from these temptations should cause us to be like men who are halt or maimed, or have only one eye, the loss will be of small consequence so long as we enter into life. Better to miss culture through a rigid Puritanism, than to gain all the polish and accomplishments of the age at the expense of our spiritual health. Though at our entrance into the divine life we should seem to have been largely losers by renouncing habits or possessions which we felt bound to quit, yet we shall be real gainers. Our main concern should be to enter into life; and if this should cost us skill of hand, nimbleness of foot, and refinement of vision, as it may, we must cheerfully deny ourselves that we may possess eternal life. To remain in sin and retain all our advantages and capacities will be an awful loss when we are cast into hell fire, which is the sure portion of all who persevere in sinning. A lame, maimed, half-blinded saint is, even on earth, better than a sinner with every faculty fully developed. It is not necessary that hand, or foot, or eye should make us stumble; but if they do, the surgical process is short, sharp, decisive — Cut them off; and cast them from

thee, or, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. The half-educated, timid, simpleminded believer, who, to escape the snares of false science, worldly cunning, and courtly pride, has cut himself off from what men call “advantages”, will, in the end, prove to have been far wiser than those who risk their souls for the sake of what worldlings imagine to be necessary to human perfecting. The man who believes God, and so is set down as losing his critical eye, is a wiser person than he who by double acumen doubts himself into hell. Two hands, two feet, and two eyes will be of small advantage if cast into everlasting fire.

Let the reader note that the terrible terms here employed are not the creation of the dark dreams of mediaeval times, but are the words of the loving Jesus.

Matthew 18:10, 11. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

The humble in heart, though judged to be fools among the ungodly, must not be so judged of by us. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones . We must see to it that we never look down on them with the pit, which is akin to contempt. They are very dear to God: they are cared for by angels, ay, by the presence angels who dwell near the eternal throne. Their angels are not in the rear rank, but in heaven do always behold the face of the Father. The highest courtiers of glory count it their honor to watch over the lowly in heart. Those who are servants to poor saints and little children are allowed free entrance to the King: what must he think of his little ones themselves?

Nay, this is not all. Jesus himself cares for the poorest and neediest. Yes, he came to save that which was lost. How dare we then be proud, and despise a child because of its youth, or a man because of his poverty, or his want of intelligence? The angels and the angels' Lord care for the most despised of our race; shall not we?

Matthew 18:12. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountain, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

We may not even think harshly of wandering ones. He who would not have us despise the little will not have us neglect the lost. Nay, the lost are to have special consideration. Is not the owner of a flock for the moment more concerned about the one astray, than the ninety and nine which are safe? The lost one is not better than any one of the others, but it is brought into prominence by its condition. It is not to the shepherd the object of deserved blame, much less of contempt; but his main thought is sympathy with its danger, and the fear that it may be destroyed before he can find it.

To save it, he makes a mountain journey, in person, neglecting the large flock in comparison with his care of the one. This is good argument for despising none — not only of the least, but of the most erring. How think ye? Ye who yourselves were once astray, and have been restored by the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, how think ye?

Matthew 18:13. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

In the shepherd's case we read, If so be that he find it ; but our great Shepherd fails not, and is not discouraged. He brings back all the sheep that his Father gave him. That sheep which, after wandering, is found, gives the shepherd more immediate joy than all the rest, just because it had caused him more present concern. Its rescue brought it to the front in his mind: he was forced to do more for it than for the ninety and nine, and therefore, estimating its value by what it has cost him, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. He is not vexed by his loss of time, nor angry because of his extra labor; but his joy is undiluted and overflowing.

Evidently the Good Shepherd does not despise the little one because of its straying; for, having restored it, he allots it a chief place in his thoughts of joy; yea, he gets from it, though it be but one, more than from ninety and nine others of the best of his flock.

Matthew 18:14. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

We may ourselves complete the parallel as to the Shepherd of souls; it is too obvious to need the Savior to rehearse it.

In the words before us, our Lord further avers that our Father who is in heaven wills not that any one of these little ones should perish. Hence, we may not despise any of them; nor, indeed, despise any because of their being lowly, and of mean estate. Humble in their own estimate of themselves, and lightly esteemed among men, as the Lord's people often are, and surrounded by cruel foes, as is frequently the case, the heavenly Father wills not their destruction, nor can they be destroyed. We must not treat the poor, the obscure, the little-gifted, as though we thought they would be better out of our way, or as if they were of no consequence whatever, and could be most properly ignored. This is in a certain sense to make them perish; for those whom we regard as nothing become to us as if they were nothing. He who sits in the highest heavens seeks out those who are lowly in heart, and of a contrite spirit because of their wanderings, and he sets great store by them. Our Father in heaven will not have us despise those who are precious in his eyes.

MATTHEW 18:15-35 THE KING'S LAW CONCERNING OFFENSES

Matthew 18:15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and sins alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

So far from despising any, we are to seek their good, even when they have done us wrong. Here is a case of personal offense: we are to endeavor to make peace with our brother who has trespassed against us. The offended is to seek the offender. We must not let the trespass rankle in our bosom, by maintaining a sullen silence; nor may we go and publish the matter abroad. We must seek out the offender, and tell him his fault as if he were not aware of it; as perhaps he may not be. Let the remonstrance be between thee and him alone. It may happen that he will at once rectify the wrong; and then we have gained, not our suit, but something worth far more — our brother. We might have lost him: happily, a frank word has won him.

God be praised!

Matthew 18:16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

If the brother has trespassed very badly, he will probably be sullen, or impertinent, and he will not hear thee. Do not, therefore, give him up; persevere in seeking peace. Give your own pleadings the support of companionship: sake with thee one or two more. Possibly the offender may notice what is said by the other brethren, although he may be prejudiced against you; or he may attach weight to united expostulation which he might not feel if the complaint came from one only. By calling in worthy arbitrators, you give the offender a fairer opportunity to set himself right.

This time, let us hope, the brother will be won. But if not, you will have secured yourself against misrepresentation: that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word, may be established. It is by misquotation of words that quarrels are fomented; and it is a great thing to have the means of rectifying erroneous reports. Although it is a very unwise thing to interfere in quarrels, yet from this text it is clear that we should be willing to be one of the two or three who are to assist in settling a difference.

Matthew 18:17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Men capable of injuring their fellows are often so hardened that they reject the kindest expostulation. If a brother acts in this way, shall we give him up? No, we must make a filial effort: Tell it unto the church. The whole assembly of the faithful must at last hear the case, and they must plead with him. He is to have an opportunity of hearing the judgment and advice of the whole brotherhood. Should this last attempt fail if he neglect to hear the church, he must be left as incorrigible. No pains and penalties are affixed. The brother is left to himself: he is regarded as being like the rest of the unbelieving world. This is the utmost stretch of our severity. He is one who needs converting, like the Gentiles outside; but towards even a heathen man and a publican we have kindly feelings; for we seek their salvation, and we seek that of the excommunicated brother in the same way. In all probability, the

obstinate friend will ridicule the action of the community; and yet there is some possibility that he will be impressed thereby, and led to a better mind. At any rate, from the first personal visit of the injured brother down to the last act of disownment, nothing has been done vindictively, but all has been affectionately carried out, with the view of setting the brother right. The trespasser who will not be reconciled has incurred much guilt by resisting the attempts of love, made in obedience to the command of the great Head of the church.

Matthew 18:18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Our Lord had inaugurated the church by handing its keys to Peter as representing the whole brotherhood; and now he distinctly recognizes those keys as being in the hands of the whole church. Verily I say unto you, "Whatsoever ye shall bind." Those who bind are all the disciples, or the whole of the church which had been called in to make peace between the two brethren. Each church has the keys of its own door. When those keys are rightly turned by the assembly below, the act is ratified above: that which they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. If, by God's grace, erring brethren repent, and are freed from the censure of the assembly, the Lord on high sanctions the deed, according to his word — Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. This is to be understood with the limitation that it is really a church of Christ which acts, that it acts in his name, and rightly administers his laws. A deep solemnity surrounds the binding and loosing of true Christian assemblies. It is no light thing to act as a church, and no little thing to be put forth from it, or to be restored again to its fellowship. Our Lord made this clear by commencing with his authoritative preface — Verily I say unto you.

Matthew 18:19. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Thus the Savior sets his seal upon assemblies of the faithful, even of the smallest kind, not only in their acts of discipline, but in their intercessions.

Note how tenderly Jesus speaks of his followers: "If two of you." Poor as you are, if two of you agree in prayer on earth, "my Father which is in heaven" will hearken to your pleading. Prayer should be matter for previous consideration, and persons about to join in prayer should "agree as touching anything that they shall ask." Then they come together with an intelligent design, seeking a known blessing, and agreeing to combine their desires and their faith in reference to the one chosen object. Two believers united in holy desire and solemn prayer will have great power with God. Instead of despising the verdict of so small a gathering, we ought to respect it, since the Father does so.

Note the power of combined prayer. There is no excuse for giving up prayer-meetings while there are two praying people in the place; for two can prevail with God. Of course, more is needed than a cold agreement that certain things are desirable; there must be importunity and faith.

Matthew 18:20. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The presence of Jesus is the fixed center of the assembly, the warrant for its coming together, and the power with which it acts. The church, however small, is gathered in his name. Jesus is there first: I am in the midst of them. We are gathered together by the holy impulses of Christian brotherhood, and our meeting is in the name of Jesus, and therefore there he is; near, not only to the leader, or to the minister, but in the midst, and therefore near to each worshipper. We meet to do him honor, to hear his Word, to stir each other up to obey his will; and he is there to aid us.

However small the number, we make a quorum; and what is done according to the laws of Christ is done with his authority. Hence it is that there is great power in united prayer from such persons: it is Jesus pleading in his saints. This should prevent Christian men from giving or taking offense; for if Jesus be in our midst, our peace must not be broken by strife.

Matthew 18:21. Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Peter's question was opportune, giving a further opening for our Lord to enlarge upon the removal of offenses. Peter takes it for granted that he would forgive, and he only wishes to know how far he may carry this forgiveness. Doubtless he thought that he had given great latitude when he suggested till seven times. Probably he felt that he would need great grace to get so far as that in the patient endurance of his brother's sinning against him. It is true Peter did not go far enough; but do we go as far? Are not some professors very mindful of small grievances? Have many of us grace enough even for a sevenfold forgiveness?

Matthew 18:22. Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Our Lord intends to teach us to forgive always and without end. He sets no limit. I say not unto thee, "until seven times." measured mercy is not according to the command. We may read the words of our Lord in this verse as seventy-seven times, or as seventy times seven, or four-hundred and-ninety times: there is no occasion to be very definite about numbers where an indefinite number is meant. We should make too small an account of offenses to occupy time in counting them, or in reckoning the number of times that we have overlooked them.

Matthew 18:23. Therefore is the kingdoms of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

The kingdom of heaven is again brought forward. We must not forget that this is the key of Matthew's Gospel. In all kingdoms there must be a king, a tribunal, and a time for judgment of those under rule. The personal servants of a king must expect to give in a special account as to how they have used their lord's goods. Our Lord is that certain king, who would take account of his servants. Even if he called no one else to give an account, he would assuredly call his own servants to a settlement.

Matthew 18:24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

Ten thousand talents was an immense amount for a servant to owe his king. Some reckon that it was equivalent to two millions of our money. It was debt which could not be paid; overwhelming, and almost incalculable.

This debt cropped up as soon as the king had begun to reckon: it was a matter of notoriety, too vast to be concealed. The debtor was brought bound before his lord, but his vast debt was his strongest bond ten thousand talents! Yet what is this amount to the burden of our obligations to God? O my soul, humble thyself as thou answerest the question, "How much owest thou?"

Matthew 18:25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The debtor was penniless: he had not to pay. The creditor takes possession of the man: his lord commanded him to be sold. His wife, his children, and all that he had were to be sold also; but all put together, when payment was to be made, it came to nothing compared with the enormous debt. The sale of the man and his family was according to Oriental justice: the generous lord here described did not hesitate to exact it, and the debtor himself raised no question about the righteousness of the proceeding. Our Lord does not justify the act of the lord in the story: he simply uses the custom as a part of the scenery of his parable. We may be thankful that the spirit of Christianity has utterly abolished a law which made unoffending children suffer for their father's default, by the loss of their liberties. The servant was in a sad plight indeed when nothing remained his own, and even his own personality was sold away from him. He had not to pay; yet by royal order payment was to be made: he was wretched indeed.

Matthew 18:26. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

He could not pay, but he could humble himself before his lord. He fell down and worshipped him. He owned the debt, and begged for time "Have patience with me ." Moreover; he gave a promise to discharge his obligations: "I will pay thee all. " The promise was not

worth the breath which spoke it. It is a very usual thing for men who can incur an enormous debt to make light of the payment, and fancy that a bill at three months is as good as gold. They dream that time is money, and that a promise is a payment. Many a poor sinner is very rich in resolutions. This servant debtor thought he only needed patience; but indeed he needed forgiveness!

It seems strange that he did not see this, since the debt was so great, and he had nothing wherewith to pay, but was utterly bankrupt: yet it is a well known fact, that men do not see their true condition before the Lord God, even when they perceive that in many things they come short.

Matthew 18:27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

Humility and prayer prevailed; for the lord of that servant was such a king as the whole universe cannot rival for pity and grace. The debtor received far more than he dared to ask; for the measure of the gracious deed was not his own sense of need, nor even his own prayers, but the compassion of his lord. The heart of the great creditor was touched, and his whole being was moved with pity. The penniless debtor was unbound, and his debt was forgiven him: his lord loosed him, and forgave him. We know what this means. This was kindness indeed! There could be no greater thing done for the debtor; and all was so free, so noble, so perfect, that it ought to have produced a great effect upon him, and have led him in his measure, to imitate the royal example. Hard was the heart which such a fire of love could not soften.

Matthew 18:28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

The same servant, but how different his bearing! Just now he was a lowly suppliant, but now he is a hectoring tyrant. He went out from the presence of his gracious lord, scarcely waiting to express his gratitude. He found one of his fellow servants; not his servant, nor his inferior, but one who was his equal, and his companion in service. This man owed him an hundred pence: a mere trifle when compared with the enormous debt which had been forgiven. We expect that he will at once wipe out that little score; but no: he laid hands on him, violently seizing him, for fear he should get away for a time. He took him by the throat, and bullied him with peremptory demands. He would have no patience with his debtor; he would not let him breathe if he did not pay. The debt was very very small, but the claim was urged with intense ferocity. Our little claims against our fellow-men are too apt to be pressed upon them with unsparing severity. The claimant had not even patience for an hour, but throttled his fellow-servant with the rough demand, "Pay me that thou owest," What right had he to be choking his lord's servant? He was injuring one who belonged to his own king. Our fellow-servant is our Lord's servant, and not ours to bully and oppress as we please.

Matthew 18:29. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

It ought to have startled the tyrant when he heard his own prayer addressed to himself. It was word for word what he had said; and the suppliant's posture was just what his own had been when before his lord: he fell down at his feet. That poor promise, too, "I will pay thee all," was repeated in his ear, and with much more likelihood of its being fulfilled.

Surely he would give the same answer as his lord had granted him! Not he: he was servile, and of an evil spirit; his lord was a king, and acted royally.

Matthew 18:30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

Not he could not, but he would not. He gave no time, proposed no composition, promised no mercy, He used the law of his own generous king as a means of treading down his poor fellow-servant. He personally attended to the debtor's arrest: he went and cast him into prison. He sees him sentenced to a debtor's dungeon, without hope of coming out again unless by payment. It was his lord's own prison, too: he was making use of his generous sovereign's lock-up to gratify his own malevolence. He vowed that his fellow-servant should lie there till he should, pay the debt.

Base conduct this! As common as it is base!

Matthew 18:31. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Others could see the evil of his conduct if he could not. His fellowservants saw what was done: he was a notable character, and what he did was sure to be observed. Much had been forgiven him, and much was expected from him. His fellowservants were very sorry for the imprisoned debtor, and sorry that any fellow-servant of theirs should degrade himself by acting in a manner so opposite to the treatment which he had received from his lord.

They were right in reporting the transaction to head-quarters; for such a foul offense ought to be known where right could be done. Instead of carrying out lynch law, they told unto their lord all that was done. This was a very sensible course of conduct on their part. Let us adopt this plan if we are ever in similar circumstances, instead of indulging in foolish gossip and angry denunciation.

Matthew 18:32, 33. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

The wretch was not condemned unheard: his lord only judged him after that he had called him. His lord and king set the matter before him very clearly, and appealed to his own judgment upon the case. He reminded him of what he appeared to have forgotten: at least, he had acted as if it had never happened. His lord addressed him in words of burning indignation: "O thou wicked servant." It was atrocious wickedness of heart which had permitted him to indulge in such unworthy conduct. "I forgave thee all that debt." What an all it was! How freely was the debt removed! "I forgave thee." The reason given was, "because thou desiredst me." Not because thou hadst deserved such leniency, or couldst ever repay it. The inference from such abounding generosity was clear, strong unanswerable.

The last words of the verse are forcible in the highest degree: "Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant?" How readily should we forgive the little offenses from which we suffer, since our Lord has pardoned our grievous transgressions! No offense of a fellow-servant can be compared with our sins against our Lord. What a model for our compassion is set before us in those words, "even as I had pity on thee"!

The culprit made no defense. What could he say? He was unable even to make another appeal to mercy. He had refused mercy, and now mercy refused him.

Matthew 18:34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

His lord was wroth: he who could be so compassionate was necessarily a man of warm feelings, and therefore he could be angry. Naturally, he was compassionate towards the poor debtor in prison, and this made him indignant with the wretch who had imprisoned him. It was righteous wrath which gave up the unforgiving servant to tremble punishment: delivered him to the tormentors, the proper executioners of justice. His punishment would be without end, for it was to last till he should pay all that was due; and the debtor could never pay the ten thousand talents. Things must take their course with malicious spirits. They have put themselves beyond the reach of mercy. Love's own greatness necessitates great indignation at the malice which insists upon revenging its little wrongs. The sovereignty of God is never unjust: he only delivers to the tormentors those whom the law of the universe necessarily condemns.

Matthew 18:35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This is the great moral lesson. We incur greater wrath by refusing to forgive than by all the rest of our indebtedness. We cannot escape from condemnation if we refuse to pardon others. If we forgive in words only, but not from our hearts, we remain

under the same condemnation.

Continued anger against our brother shuts heaven's gate in our own faces.

The heavenly Father of the Lord Jesus will be righteously wrathful against us, and will deliver us to the tormentors if we do not from our hearts forgive every one his brother's trespasses.

Lord, make me of a meek, forgiving spirit! May my heart be as ready to pardon offenses as it is to beat!