

## July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 9”

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis

### Matthew 18:34-35

**34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.**

**35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Verse **35** of **Matthew 18**, in my opinion, is the most chilling verse in the Bible. During this lesson, I am going to tell you why.

We live in the age of the exaltation of feelings. This comes, in part, from the fact that health insurance companies pay doctors to prescribe drugs that treat emotional conditions that have no physical basis and are not organic brain diseases, such as “attention deficit disorder”, which was previously treated with discipline, and “depression”, which was previously treated by physical exercise, having more to do, and by having a more fulfilled life. The advent of the easy availability of psychotropic medication, which is the legal equivalent to the illegal drugs which “drug addicts” take to calm down or feel better on a temporary basis, has brought us to a situation in which it is normal to anesthetize ourselves to negative feelings. We inappropriately reject the fact that we are supposed to feel negative feelings, as we are to feel physical pain, as a warning that something is wrong.

A woman wrote, “Fourteen years ago, I was in my senior year in high school, and I began having increasing anxiety about paying for college, leaving my friends, taking on more responsibility, and in general, becoming an adult. My mother had been taking Prozac for depression. She interpreted my anxiety and struggle for independence as “depression”, and decided that she had genetically passed her depression on to me. My mother began giving me her Prozac, and then took me to the doctor so that I could obtain my very own prescription.

For the next fourteen years, I went from doctor to doctor, constantly fighting what I determined was “depression”. I stopped the medication from time to time if I was pregnant or nursing, but I always hung on to my mother’s diagnosis. It was my excuse for not achieving goals, for losing jobs, for failing to follow through with commitments, for screaming at my kids, and nearly destroying my marriage. I became self-absorbed, self-centered, and felt entitled to

happiness, regardless of my lack of effort to achieve. I lived my life trying to “feel better”, but I was seldom happy, and never content.

Just three months ago, I made yet another trip to the doctor about my “condition”. I was not able to see my general practitioner, so I made an appointment with my gynecologist, who had delivered my second child six months prior. I thought that he would be especially sensitive and sympathetic to my emotions since he dealt with pregnant women all day. He was, but not as I expected.

After I tearfully described the last fourteen years of my depressed life, and all my suspected conditions; ‘I probably have depression, I probably have anxiety, I may even have bipolar’; and the myriad of medications I had been on, I fully expected to be prescribed the latest, most updated, anti-depressant.

I was dumbfounded when he told me, “I don’t think you have depression.” He proceeded to explain what depression really is, and how my symptoms did not qualify me for the diagnosis. Then, he explained what happens when young women are misdiagnosed with depression and then given psychotropic medication. The drugs make women numb. They don’t learn how to cope with their feelings and control their behavior. They lose ambition, direction, purpose and zest for life. Life becomes robotic. Sadness, pain and frustration are dulled, but so are passion, excitement and happiness.

Instead of giving me drugs that day, my doctor gave me something much more effective. He told me that I wasn’t experiencing depression; but that sadness, anxiety and frustration are normal parts of life. He told me that instead of popping a pill when I feel bad, I should do something constructive; take a walk, make love to my husband, play with my kids, talk to a friend, or simply wait it out.

Today, I am finally free of the drugs and of the yoke of being depressed. I am more confident, happy, focused and driven than I have been in a long time. I had to give up my excuse for being unhappy, and look outside of myself to finally gain happiness. True happiness lies in love, compassion and service to others.

I am not free from pain, misfortune and disappointment, but I am finally free from my mother’s diagnosis of depression, and am happy to be my kid’s mom and my husband’s loving girlfriend. Happiness does not come in a pill, but ultimately, happiness is a choice, no matter one’s circumstance.

As I taught in our last lesson, we ought not use our feelings as an excuse for bad behavior. We are not designed to live in a constant state of euphoria, but are tasked, by God, to overcome challenges. Drugs are not the solution to emotional problems, unless the problems are the result of physical illness or an organic brain disorder that can be corrected by the medication. If we feel bad emotionally, we ought not pop a legal drug any more than we should take an illegal one. We need to do something for someone else to make ourselves feel better, because God did not design us to be self-absorbed. **Genesis 2:18** tells us:

**18 And the LORD God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”**

God did not say, I will make him a drug so that he can feel better being alone. God said, I will make him a companion, a helper with whom he can share the work that I am going to give him to do.

Life is, in its essence, companionship. God created us so that He would have someone with whom to be. He enjoys watching and participating with us as we mature by solving the problems that He gives us, in the same way that we obtain joy as we watch our children take on life, grow and succeed.

God recognizes that we are learning, we are growing, and we are developing, and that failure is part of development. No one can develop by doing things right all of the time. We have to have some failures in order to learn. This week, I was installing a complicated piece of software on a computer platform with which I was unfamiliar, and found myself having to read and interpret detailed and complicated instructions. It took me three hours to get the software installed properly, after having to figure out how to interpret the ambiguous, complicated instructions in the way that the author intended them. A couple of the things that I tried did not work out so well, but I persevered, and eventually I finished the job.

That is the way that life is. The only thing that we can really do to fail is quit. I have read the end of the story and I know that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will, regardless of how bad their situation looks, eventually come our alright. After all, Jesus Christ died on the Cross, and He made out pretty well. God will always allow those of us that have been saved by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to try again, and He tells us to provide the same tolerance to those with whom we come into contact. In **Matthew 18:21-22**:

**Then Peter approached and said, "Lord, how often do I have to forgive a brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?"**

**Jesus replied, "Listen to Me: not up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven!"**

We have to forgive repeatedly to deal with the various situations of life because ultimately, we will want to be forgiven repeatedly. Jesus gave His life so that we could be forgiven repeatedly, and God requires us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He tells us, in **Ephesians 2:8-10**:

**8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,**

**9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.**

**10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

Jesus Christ has not put us in His Church because of our ability or for our pleasure, but to do the good works that God has prepared for us, the best of which is to become Christ-like. Paul tells us, in **Romans 8:28-29**:

**28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

**29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

As we consciously conform to become copies of the Christ, we will find that we have the responsibility to forgive our repentant brothers that sin against us, as the whole purpose of the coming of the Christ was that we might be forgiven.

Once upon a time, there was a king that was not very interested in ruling his kingdom. He concentrated on his business, and after twenty years, he had amassed a fortune of \$103 million dollars.

At that point, he decided to retire. He calculated that he needed an income of \$3 million dollars a year to live comfortably and do all of the things that he wanted to do.

The king called ten investment bankers that did business in his kingdom to a meeting. “I’m retiring”, he told them, “and I would like to invest \$10 million with each of your firms for one year. I require a 3.3% return, which is \$330,000. If you decide to take this investment, and earn less than \$330,000, your fee will be 3% of whatever you make. If you make more than \$330,000 or more, your fee will be \$30,000 plus half of everything that you make over \$330,000. But don’t lose my money. Under no circumstances can my account with your company be worth less than \$10 million at the end of the year.

All of the bankers agreed to the king’s terms, and the king transferred his funds to their banks, took the other \$3 million that he had, and moved away.

One of the bankers was contacted by a businessman that had a successful manufacturing business, and that wanted to build an addition to his factory. “The addition will cost me about \$10 million”, said the businessman, “and if you can get me the capital, I will pay you 8.3%, or \$830,000 per year on the money.”

The banker looked over the prospectus that the businessman brought him outlining what he planned to do. The banker visited the existing factory, and did market research on the viability of the businessman’s marketing plan. After doing his due diligence, the banker decided that the investment was a good one, and underwrote \$10 million worth of bonds for the businessman. “Well”, said the banker to himself, “if everything goes according to form, the king and I will be all set.”

The situation continued to look promising until September, at which time the businessman contacted the banker. “Sir”, started the businessman, “I have some bad news to report. Lightning struck the construction site last night, started a fire, and burned down half of the plant. It is going to take us a couple of months to rebuild, and, although we have insurance for the building, we are not going to be able to manufacture our product for at least a month. I’ve gone over the projections with which I made the commitment to you, and I project that I will not be able to make my commitment.”

The banker asked, “What is your new profit projection?”

The businessman answered, “Well, I project that we are going to have about a \$3 million loss this year. Insurance will cover about \$1 million of that amount, so, at year’s end, I project that your investment will be worth about \$8 million.”

The banker responded, “That is not acceptable. You need to come up with that other \$2 million. My commitment to the king is that I will at least break even.”

The businessman replied, “We will do our best. Once we get back into production I hope that we can make up the shortfall, but these numbers are about as optimistic as I can realistically make them.”

The businessman’s projections turned out to be true, and at the end of the year, the market value of the bonds that the banker had written was in fact \$8 million.

‘Well’, said the banker to himself, ‘I suppose that the king knows that in any investment, past performance is no guarantee of future results, and people can and do lose money. I’ll just have to go to the meeting and break the bad news.’

When the banker arrived at the annual meeting, he intentionally stayed in the back of the room because he wanted to hear the other reports first. The first banker started, “We have had an excellent year. I made 20% on your investment, which entitles me to a fee of \$880,000, and makes your account with my firm worth \$11,220,000, which is almost four times more profit than your expectation of \$10,300,000.

“Well done”, said the king, “I appreciate your work. Who is next?”

The other bankers followed the first one, and everyone banker had a positive return. In the end, the value of the king’s fund was \$115 million, not counting the last banker. Finally, the king turned his attention to the banker with the loss.

“Well, O King”, the banker began, “unfortunately, I have bad news. The investment that into which I put your money failed to perform as I expected because of a fire in the plant, and the value of your investment is now only \$8 million. The plant has been rebuilt, production is back to normal, and I have renegotiated a new contract with the owner that will allow me to recover your investment in next year.”

“Unfortunately”, said the king, “that is not acceptable. The terms of the contract specified that the value of the investment cannot be less than \$10 million at the end of the year. I’ll give you a week to come up with the other \$2 million, or I’ll have to liquidate your personal assets to make up the difference.”

The banker left the meeting and began trying to raise money, but he was only able to raise \$500,000. At the end of the week, he brought a cashier’s check in that amount to the king, and said, “Sir, this is my best good faith effort to come up with the \$2 million, but I just need more time. Just give me another chance, and you won’t be sorry.”

“Well”, said the king, “I’m not in the habit of giving second chances, and I don’t want to set a precedent that might make the other bankers sanguine about my investments, so I am going to foreclose on all of your assets and liquidate them. In addition, you and your family will have to become my personal slaves until you can work off the \$1.5 million. I project that it will take you about 10 years.”

Upon hearing the king’s answer, the banker lost his businesslike demeanor. He fell to his knees and began begging. “O wise and merciful king”, he said, “please, please give me another chance. Please don’t destroy my family and all that I have tried to build. I’ve been a good citizen of your kingdom, I’ve always been loyal and law abiding. The failure was not my fault; the fire was an act of God started by lightning, and I have demanded that the businessman triple the amount of insurance that he carries so that another disaster will not cause a shortfall in your investment. Please sir, this is a good investment, and if you just give me another chance and I’m sure that I can get you an acceptable return.”

The king listened to the banker’s pleas, and had compassion on him. “Well”, said the king, “I’m not really as heartless and greedy as I seem. I expected to earn \$3 million on my investments, and I have actually earned \$23 million, so I’m \$20 million to the good. Let’s start over fresh. Don’t worry about the other \$1.5 million. Let’s call it even and start over.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you”, said the banker, “you won’t be sorry. I’ll make sure that I have your money next time. You can count on me. Thank you for another chance.”

The banker left the king's palace rejoicing, but then he began to think about the next year. "I'd better get all the money that I can piled up so that I don't find myself in this position again, because the king might not be so benevolent if there is a next time."

The banker went to his office and began looking for delinquent accounts. Almost all of his customers were solvent, but he saw one account in which the debtor was three months behind on a loan that required \$50 per month payment, so the debtor was \$150 past due. The banker called the debtor. "You're three months past due", said the banker, "I need your account caught up immediately."

"The factory in which I was working burned down, and I was laid off", said the debtor, "I've been struggling, but I just went back to work this week. I'll make a payment when I get my first paycheck in two weeks, and then I'll catch up as soon as I can."

"Not a chance", said the banker, "It's not my fault that you lost your job. You have 24 hours or it is debtor's prison for you. Do whatever you have to, but get me my money."

The next day, the man came into the bank. "All I have is \$25", said the man, "and I intended to use it for gas money to get to work, but I'll give it to you as a sign of my good faith. Just give me more time, and I'll pay back all I owe."

"Guard", yelled the banker, "arrest this man and take him to debtor's prison. Now!"

**Matthew 18:21-30** reads:

**21 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"**

**22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.**

**23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.**

**24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents (about \$10 million).**

**25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.**

**26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'**

**27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.**

**28 "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii (about \$150); and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!'**

**29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'**

**30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.**

In the parables that we are discussing today, the king represents God, the banker represents you and I, and the debtor that owes the \$150 represents our brother that has sinned against us.

If we take account of all of the sins that we have committed during our entire lives, we see that our sins against God are great. Comparatively, our brother hasn't sinned nearly as much

against us as we have against God, but we are sometimes so self-centered that we actually think that sins performed against us are more heinous than our sins against God.

In our minds, we subjectively feel that our own sin should be justified and excused, but we also subjectively feel that people that sin against us need to be condemned. The banker begged to be pardoned for losing the king's money because he was not responsible for the factory burning down, but, the banker refused to extend the same mercy that the king extended to him to the man who lost his job because of the same fire. The banker might try to justify his decision by arguing that he was traumatized by not having sufficient financial resources, having almost becoming a slave and losing everything that he had. God tells us, however, that in spite of stressful situations, we are to exercise the free will that we have to choose to emulate the example of Jesus Christ, rather than choosing to act in antisocial ways or taking psychotropic medication.

Stress may bring our worst to the surface, but God wants us to override our weakness by recognizing the truth of and acting on that which he tells us in His Word. **2Corinthians 4:7-10** tells us:

**7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.**

**8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;**

**9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—**

**10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ show us that the problems of this life should always be faced with equanimity, that God is really in control. Regardless of that which people do or threaten to do to us, the reach of our enemies and even our friends only extends so far. Neither insecurity about our enemies nor the displeasure of our brother ought to sway our decision to emulate the life of Jesus Christ in our circumstances. Jesus himself gives us an example, in **Luke 9:52b-56**:

**52 And as [Jesus and His disciples] went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for [Jesus].**

**53 But [the Samaritans] did not receive [Jesus], because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.**

**54 And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?”**

**55 But [Jesus] turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.**

**56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.” And they went to another village.**

James and John considered the Samaritan's failure to provide accommodations for Jesus to be blasphemous disrespect. James and John wanted to retaliate against this disrespect with force, and Jesus certainly had the power to do so, but to do so would be contrary to the plan that God had for Jesus' life, as He said, **the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.**

We are always to act in a manner that reflects our allegiance to Jesus Christ. We are not to destroy others, but to save them, if possible. Our behavior should reflect the fact that Jesus died so that God would forgive us, and our most important task, as Christians, is to give ourselves to facilitate reconciliation as Jesus did by forgiving others, even as we have been forgiven because of Jesus. **2Corinthians 5:18-20** tells us:

**18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,**

**19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.**

**20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.**

But the banker refused to forgive. Let see what happened next. **Matthew 18:31-33** reads:

**31 So when his fellow servants [bankers] saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master [the king] all that had been done.**

**32 Then his master [the king], after he had called him [the banker], said to him, 'You wicked servant [banker]! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.**

**33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant [debtor], just as I had pity on you?'**

So the King, the master, God is angry with us when we refuse to forgive repentant sinners. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 7:2-5**:

**2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.**

**3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?**

**4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?**

**5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

I hope that the point that Jesus is making is clear. We cannot say that we are Christians, emulating the image of likeness of Jesus Christ, while at the same time being unforgiving and vindictive.

It is not enough to have faith in facts. We have to show our faith in Jesus by emulating His example. We are not saved by being able to recount the history of Jesus Christ. Anyone with a Bible can learn to do that, whether they believe or not. But to be saved means that we decide to take on the attributes of Jesus Christ, to live a spirit-filled life, and the primary evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is our ability to forgive. **Matthew 18:21-22** tells us:

**Then Peter approached and said, "Lord, how often do I have to forgive a brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?"**

**Jesus replied, "Listen to Me: not up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven!"**

In the parable, the king told the banker that he should have had the same type of compassion on his debtor that he received from the king. **Matthew 18:34** says:

**34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.**



The story ends with the most chilling verse in the Bible. **Matthew 18:35** says:

**35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”**

No forgiveness, no salvation. Brothers and sisters, if you have to pay for your own sins, you are in trouble. The torturer in the parable is the fire of hell, and if you choose not to forgive a repentant brother, the Bible says that you have a lot of burning to do. Our ability to forgive others is the key to the salvific contract, and for many of us, that is not an easy task. The ability to interact with others in the way that Jesus did is the primary attribute that we need to receive from the Holy Spirit.

Salvation is free, but to actually receive it, we have to voluntarily yield to the leading of the Holy Spirit, change our thinking and become Christlike. Jesus tells us, in **John 3:5-6**:

**5 Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

**6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

So, to forgive as the Lord requires, we need a spiritual rebirth. It is not enough to simply know that which we need to do; we must be born again; we must actually be changed. Is there someone that you need to forgive? Are you holding a grudge and failing to forgive someone that has repented of their sin against you? To release your grudge is a matter for prayer, as we need to call on the Holy Spirit for help. He can help us as we grow in grace and knowledge.

But, we have to humbly recognize our shortcomings and sincerely ask the Lord to change our hearts. I can't stress too strongly that lip service is not enough; we have to actually humble ourselves, recognize our shortcomings, and cooperate with the Holy Spirit to make the changes that we need to make. But, be encouraged, we can do it. All we need is sincere a desire to be that which Jesus calls us to be, and faith in the Lord. Jesus tells us, in **John 14:12-17, 16:13, 16:33**:

**12 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.**

**13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**

**14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.**

**15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.**

**16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—**

**17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.**

**18 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.**

**33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

Adjust your thinking so that rather than focusing on things that irritate you for the short period of time that you are going to live in this life, you can change your focus to that which the Spirit teaches us, to building your hopes on things eternal. Hold to God's unchanging hand.

Reverend Darryl R. Curtis  
Family Life Baptist Church