

Session Five · Grace, Debt, and Forgiveness

Pharisee & Tax Collector · Two Debtors · Unforgiving Servant · Laborers in the Vineyard

WHAT WE FOUND

Four parables about how grace actually works, and how it refuses to be earned or hoarded. The tax collector goes home justified, not the Pharisee, because he came with empty hands and seven honest words. The one forgiven much loves much.

Then the edge: the servant forgiven an unpayable debt seizes a fellow servant by the throat over a tiny one, and his own pardon is revoked. To receive mercy and refuse to give it is to nullify the mercy received. The Laborers close the set by exposing the elder-brother reflex again: grace given freely to the latecomers looks like unfairness only to those who thought they were owed.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) The tax collector’s prayer is nearly the whole gospel in seven words; and in the Our Father we ask to be forgiven “as we forgive,” binding the two together.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407), *Homilies on Matthew*, Homily 61 (on Matthew 18:21-35): The debts are incomparable: what we owe God dwarfs anything owed to us, so the forgiven who will not forgive contradict the pardon they have received.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) The tax collector descends in humility and is lifted; the Pharisee climbs in self-regard and falls. The way up in the Kingdom is down.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) Charity is the form of every virtue (*Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 8), and it extends even to those who have wronged us (II-II, q. 25, aa. 8-9); mercy received obliges mercy given.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. When you pray this week, begin with the tax collector’s seven words: “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Pray it slowly, and let it be the first sentence of your prayer for seven days.
2. Take the person you find hardest to forgive and pray for them by name once a day this week. Do not require yourself to feel anything yet. Forgiveness often begins as a decision and becomes a feeling later. Begin with the decision.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Copy it out this week and carry it with you: **Matthew 18:33**

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

One line, an image, or a question from tonight that you do not want to lose:

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read ahead: Luke 10:25-37 (the Good Samaritan) and Matthew 7:24-27 (the Wise and Foolish Builders).

Catechism: CCC 2009, 2839, 2840, 2843