

THE ART OF BATTLING GIANTS

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 18.21-35

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our series The Art of Battling Giants. The past two weeks we have thought together about the David and Goliath story, the giants that we battle each day, and the “desirable difficulties” that aren’t all that desirable, but that God can use to transform us.

In this study, we will think together about the giants between us. That is, the ways we hurt each other, and are called to forgive each other in the name of Jesus.

II. Connecting with One Another

Can you think of a time when you made a mistake, and we’re forgiven? How did that feel? How did it transform your relationship with the person who forgave you?

III. Study the Text

- a. Matthew 18 contains a great deal about Kingdom life and relationships in the community of God. Let’s start by reading the different sections that lead up to the passage we’ll study in detail. For each passage below, summarize the general teaching in your own words in the space provided:

verses 1-5:

verses 6-9:

verses 10-14:

verses 15-20:

Is there anything surprising in these verses that you haven’t read before? If you’re meeting with a group, take some time to discuss these. (If you’re working through this study alone, you’re invited to join a group, which can be a rich and rewarding experience in your journey of faith! Contact Pastor Paul White at paul@gspc.org if you’d like to learn more!)

- b. Read Matthew 18.21-22. How do you understand Peter’s question in light of what we’ve already engaged in Matthew 18.1-20? Do you think Peter, the chief spokesman for the group, is being less than gracious? Why or why not?

- c. Peter's question explicitly engages an important topic that undergirds the whole of the New Testament: Forgiveness. His question was common in first century rabbinic debates. The common first-century answer was that forgiveness should be granted three times, but not the fourth. As such, Peter's choosing of the number seven implied at least generosity, and maybe inspired by the Hebrew understanding that the number seven signified completeness. How does knowing the context of these rabbinic teachings alter your understanding of Peter's question?
- d. In the original Greek language, Jesus' initial response in verse 22 states that we should forgive "seventy times seven" times, which led some ancient scribes to complete the math problem, translating his statement that we should forgive 490 times! Do you think that's what Jesus was getting at? Why or why not?

N.T. Wright explains, "If you're still counting how many times you've forgiven someone, you're not really forgiving them at all, but simply postponing revenge. 'Seventy times seven' is a typical bit of Jesus' teasing. What he means, of course, is 'don't even think about counting; just do it.'"

- e. As noted above, in a way Jesus is joking with His disciples. In another way, though, He is quite serious: This is what the Kingdom of God looks like! Scholars note an interesting "seventy-seven times" connection in Genesis 4.23-24, where Lamech states:

I have killed a man for wounding me,
 a young man for injuring me.
 If Cain is avenged seven times,
 then Lamech seventy-seven times.

How does this subtle allusion open up the significance and seriousness of our text?

- f. Read Matthew 18.23-27. The Greek word for "ten thousand" is "myriad." It's considered the highest number possible, an innumerable or countless figure. A literal exchange of 10,000 talents would be around 20 million dollars today! As such, it would have been impossible for the man to pay back the debt in an indentured servitude that the king had in mind. How does this transform your understanding that the king canceled the debt entirely?
- g. While we might be tempted to see this parable in light of a normal everyday bank transaction, chances are that Jesus had something very different in mind. Jesus was most likely envisioning a king and a governor in one of his provinces. As such, this governor wouldn't have *borrowed* money, but rather *embezzled* it from tax revenue! How does that change your understanding of the story Jesus is telling about the Kingdom of God?
- h. Read Matthew 18.28-31. The 100 denarii referenced in verse 28 would be worth about \$20 today. In itself this is not insignificant, as it's over three months wages for a common laborer, but compared to the 20 million dollars alluded to above, it's a very small sum. Notice, the man who owed \$20 was also a member of the king's administration. What, then, is the difference between the two men who were owed money? Why was one willing to forgive the debt and the other unwilling?
- i. Read Matthew 18.32-35. In verse 35, Jesus makes clear what we knew all along: That the characters in His parable were representatives for God and ourselves. Can you imagine how Peter and the other disciples felt when they heard that if they don't

forgive others, God won't forgive them? After hearing all along that they only needed to forgive someone three times!?

How do you feel hearing this difficult teaching?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. In this first century culture, it was understood that you should forgive someone three times. What does our culture think about forgiving someone? How many times should you forgive someone?
- b. What about in church culture? How many times should Christians forgive one another? Is the church more like Lamech or Jesus?
- c. Have you ever counted how many times you've forgiven someone?
- d. How has this study transformed your thoughts regarding the Lord's prayer, where we pray "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors"?
- e. Do you feel assurance that God has forgiven your sins?
- f. Is there anyone you need to forgive?

V. Pray

- a. Thank God for the work of the Joint Discernment team who spent countless hours researching, meeting, and writing our Joint Solution with Los Ranchos Presbytery representatives,
- b. Pray for the Joint Solution settlement with Los Ranchos Presbytery, that the necessary funds would be raised, and that the solution would be approved by Presbytery,
- c. Lift up our worship gatherings this weekend, that we would worship God in spirit and in truth, and newcomers would be welcomed and feel at home.