

“Unless you forgive.” Jesus came down from the mountain to find a crowd and some of us disciples in disarray. A man, who had been talking to us, ran up to Jesus and begged for help. His son was struggling with mental illness and was regularly hurting himself. The man had asked us to help, but we had not been able to heal the boy. Jesus said, **“This is a faithless and perverse culture. How long must I put up with you?!”** Jesus was clearly frustrated and discouraged. He had given us the power to heal and cast out evil spirits, but we had been completely powerless when faced with this boy in the grips of mental illness. Jesus faced the boy and the same evil spirit and illness that we had been powerless against—and he immediately saved the boy, bringing him healing in body and soul. We were shocked and now frustrated ourselves. Why on earth had we been unable to do that?! We pulled Jesus aside and asked him why our attempts to heal the boy with mental illness had been unsuccessful. He said, **“It was because of your lack of faith. If you have faith even the size of the tiniest seed, you will be able to move mountains. Nothing will be impossible for you.”**

We returned to Galilee and Jesus again told us that the true and faithful people of the Creator would be betrayed, killed, and then raised again to new life. We were greatly distressed that Jesus kept bringing up this path of death on a cross. Then some temple authorities came up to Peter and asked him if Jesus paid the temple tax that had been instituted by Moses. Peter said that we did. Jesus then spoke to Peter, **“Who do earthly rulers tax—their own children or the others in their kingdom?”** Peter said that rulers only tax the subjects in their kingdoms. Jesus said, **“Indeed, the children are free. But we still pay the tax to the temple so we do not cause them to go astray.”** We were children of Israel, we were children of the Creator, we should be free from being taxed, but Jesus urged us to submit to the tax for the sake of others, to make ourselves humble servants of all.

So we pulled Jesus aside and asked him, **“What does it mean to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven?”** Jesus took a child and stood her in front of us. Then he said, **“If you do not change and become like a child you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself like a child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”** Jesus told us we needed to be very careful about not causing others to go astray by seeking and pursuing the world’s ways of greatness. He said we needed to **cut out** the members of our community that were pursuing worldly greatness and thereby causing others to go astray. Yet first, before cutting them out, we should do everything we could to humble ourselves and **forgive** them—trying to bring them back into the community. If even one member of our community went astray, seeking greatness like the world, then we needed to do everything we could to bring them back home, just as we would for a lost sheep. This is what Jesus was doing for us. We had been **straying** into the world’s ways of greatness and he kept pursuing us, over and over, and bringing us back to the way of faith.

Peter then asked Jesus how many times we must be willing to humble ourselves and forgive a brother who has gone astray and hurt us. Was seven times enough? Jesus said, **“Not seven times, but seventy times seven times.”** Then Jesus told us a story. He said the Kingdom of Heaven was like a king settling accounts with his servants. A man was brought to him who owed a debt that would take multiple lifetimes to work off. The man’s family and everything he owned was to be **sold** to pay for the debt. The man fell before the king and begged him to be patient with him so he could figure out a way to pay him back. The king had compassion on him and **forgave** his **whole** debt. The man then went and found a fellow servant who owed him 100 days worth of pay. He grabbed the man and started choking him, demanding that he pay back his debt. The fellow servant begged him to be patient and give him time to pay back the debt. But the man refused and threw his fellow servant into prison. Those who saw this happen went and reported it to the king. The king brought the man in and said, **“You harmful servant! I forgave you your whole debt! Why did you not have the same kind of mercy on your fellow servant?!”** Then the king had the man, whom he had previously forgiven, thrown into prison until he could pay back his whole debt. Then Jesus said to us, **“This is what my heavenly Father will do to you, unless you forgive others from your heart.”**

Everything was starting to come together. We were beginning to understand why we had been unable to heal that boy trapped in mental illness. It all started with **forgiveness**. The path of forgiveness was the path of **humility**. The path of humility was the path of the **cross**. The path of the cross was the path of **faith**. The path of faith was the key to having true greatness in the Kingdom and exercising the Kingdom’s **power of healing**. We had been unable to **heal** because we were not **forgiving** others. The Creator had **forgiven us** an immeasurable debt. Jesus was forgiving us **everyday** for our wanderings and straying from his path—patiently bringing us back to his Way. And yet we were like the servant in the parable, being forgiven and then treating others with unforgiveness. We wanted faith, desperately, and the power it offered. But because we were unwilling to truly **let go** and **forgive** all those we encountered, we had no true faith. And therefore we were powerless and helpless against the diseases, sicknesses, and evil spirits of our world. If we wanted to live in the Kingdom and its power then we had one task: **Forgive**.

“Unless you forgive.” It is very hard to change our thinking and perspective, to have our whole worldview turned upside down. Our culture and world has trained us to think a particular way about greatness and power and even faith. So when Jesus gives us the power to heal and cast out evil spirits we assume it is power like the **world** gives. But we couldn’t be more wrong. The power to heal is found in taking up our **cross**, lowering ourselves, becoming **humble** servants even though we are free children, and of letting go and **forgiving**. Jesus calls those who dwell in his Kingdom the **“little ones.”** The world teaches us that we should be “great ones” and “powerful ones”—but this only ends up destroying us. But if we become **“little ones”** and humble ourselves in faith, then we will have true power. **“Nothing will be impossible”** for us, nothing will be able to stand against us if we lower ourselves to become nothing. In fact, we are nothing and we need to accept that in faith. We have no power that is our own. But our heavenly Father has power and he freely shares that with us if we embrace our nothingness and become **“little ones”** who let go and freely forgive all those we encounter. We become the **“little ones”** of the Kingdom of Heaven by forgiving.

“Unless you forgive.” Do you want the power of the Kingdom that can move mountains? Do you want the faith with which **“nothing will be impossible for you”**? Then you must humble yourself, lay down your life, and **forgive** in the way the Creator has forgiven you. If you refuse to forgive others, then you will be a powerless prisoner—stuck in the endless cycles of debt and repayment. But if you forgive others freely, then you will be free and you will be able to **move mountains**. You will be able to heal, cast out evil spirits, and raise the dead. **“Unless you forgive”** you will not have the power to heal or be healed. **“Unless you forgive”** you will not be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. You have been forgiven by the Lord, an **immeasurable** debt, he has chosen to forgive **you** for all of your addictions, failures, and stupid choices. But now he sends you out to forgive everyone around you in the same way he has forgiven you. Stop thinking so much of yourself, become a **“little one”** and forgive—and the power of the Kingdom will heal you and those you encounter. **Amen.**