

## The Community of the King.

### Boundaried, but not Limited. Matthew 18:10-35

#### What kind of community?

What kind of community would you want to belong to, be associated with?

One that didn't care about how people treated each other within it?

One that on the books had high standards of behaviour, but was indifferent to whether members kept them or not?

One that, as soon as you failed once to keep the rules – that was it – you were out?

One that encouraged gossip about and public shaming of those who deviated from accepted standards?

To ask the questions is to answer them.

We wouldn't want to be part of a community that was indifferent to how people treated each other, or encouraged hypocrisy by proclaiming standards and never bothered about whether they were kept.

And we would find it hard to be in one that showed no grace, that policed conformity by fear and shame

Or we might find it easy to go along with that – until we were the one that slipped up.

Those kinds of communities drive people away

People whose wrongs are not addressed, who leave hurt and embittered by the treatment they have received at the hands of others

Or people who have done wrong and can find no way back, excluded forever

Jesus' community, the community of the King – is one where, taught by the Lord Jesus – there are very high standards

The Lord Jesus said to His followers in the sermon on the mount, back in chapter 5:20, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven"

*Matthew 5:20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.*

And he had then described that righteousness – in turning away from anger and pursuing reconciliation, in saying no to lust even in our minds, faithfulness in marriage, keeping our word, generosity in our treatment of others, even when they wrong or impose on us, loving even our enemies

The community of King Jesus has very high standards of behaviour expected of His followers, and it's only as we live by Jesus' word that we are the salt and light in our world Jesus wants us to be.

But it's also a community that doesn't want any driven away, where every member, even the most humble is precious.

Where God wants the straying brought back to the flock vv. 10-14

*Matthew 18:12 What do you think? If someone has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hillside and go and search for the stray? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over that sheep more than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14 In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish.*

As we heard read the Lord Jesus said "It is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones perish."

How can we be a community of imperfect people, people who are poor in spirit, with not a lot of spiritual resources or strength in ourselves, committed to following the teaching and example of a perfect Saviour?

Real about righteousness while not driving any away?

How as a community can we, people who will fail and offend, insist on high standards without breeding hypocrisy, partiality, and legalism?

Be a community where none are driven away and the straying can be brought back

Jesus gives the answer in Matthew 18

vv. 15-20 - We are to be a boundaried community, that is a community with clear behavioural boundaries where, if someone insists on persistently ignoring or breaking those boundaries, they place themselves outside the community, a boundaried community where each member is active to maintain the standards

But not vv. 21-35 a limited community, instead a community without limits on forgiveness because we know ourselves to be the community of the greatly forgiven

And its in being a boundaried but not limited community we will be a community we will be glad to belong to as Jesus' followers

A community in which we can grow

### **Boundaried**

Matthew 18:15

*"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he won't listen take one or two others with you so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. 17 IF he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you."*

V. 15 *If your brother or sister sins against you,*

Its not if your brother or sister offends you

Or if someone makes you feel bad

Jesus says if your brother or sister sins against you.

Tells you a couple of things

Firstly, Jesus is concerned for the sinning individual and their good

What will cause someone to stray from Jesus' flock?

What will cause v. 14 'one of these little ones to perish'?

It is sin, sin persisted in.

*1 Cor. 6:<sup>9</sup> Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,<sup>10</sup> no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.*

*Ephesians 5:*<sup>5</sup> For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

*Galatians 5:*<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity,<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions,<sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I am warning you about these things—as I warned you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Jesus wants a community that is real about stopping sinning – for that is what causes people to perish

He doesn't want sin to go unaddressed

And secondly, it tells you we relate to each other on the basis of objective standards of right and wrong, not on our own subjective feelings of how we may or may not want to be treated.

It is God who tells us what constitutes sin, tells us in His word.

Sin is missing the mark, falling short – of God's standards, not ours or the ones our community may have made up.

We don't create the boundaries of the behaviour that is acceptable in the community of King Jesus. He does by His teaching, teaching that fulfils all the law and the prophets.

So the question we have to ask of our treatment by others is 'Is it right? Does it conform to the way the Lord Jesus says we should live?'

Trivial example – I might have been hurt by someone forgetting my birthday, but is it sin?

I might be angry about someone not turning up on time, but was it sin? And the answer to that may be the cause of their being late – thoughtlessness that causes you to break your word – is sin; but getting a flat tyre ten minutes from your destination isn't.

I mightn't have like what someone said to me – but Was it sin? It might be truthful, said for my good?

Sin isn't making you feel bad. It is missing the mark of Jesus' standards in action or word

Good to be clear about that, for it keeps us focused on our responsibility

While we have to consider the feelings of others, in the end we can't be responsible for another's feelings – who knows what else is going on in someone's life, but we can be responsible for our words and actions

When you are wronged there May be a place for telling someone how their words and actions made you feel

It May help, should help, them understand the hurtfulness of the wrong they have done

But the sin isn't making you feel bad, it is the wrong the other has done that made you feel bad

You might feel bad about being conned out of twenty dollars. But the sin isn't making you feel bad – it is conning you out of the twenty dollars

And it is the wrong you must rebuke

[This is increasingly Different from the world, where, having lost objective right and wrong the sin is making someone feel bad

Which weaponises feelings in relationships

Makes the victim the judge of right and wrong – for right and wrong depends on how they feel

Makes our behaviour hostage to other's feelings

And means often that the focus in the interaction is on the offended,

But Jesus is commanding the wronged, the sinned against, to take the initiative for the good of the offender whom Jesus wants you to convict of sin so that they turn from it and remain in Jesus' people]

And it says 'sins against you'.

Your engagement with the sinning person is not based on hearsay, but personal experience.

Jesus is not licensing a moral vigilantism, where believers go around sniffing out sin in the lives of others

He is talking about having real relationships with our brothers and sisters in the community of Jesus' people, a community that is committed to living Jesus' way, and loving each other enough to help each other continue living Jesus' way

For that is what rebuking the person who has sinned against you is about.

Love

Jesus is calling on His people to practice what God had commanded the people of Israel

*Leviticus 19: <sup>16</sup> Do not go about spreading slander among your people; do not jeopardize your neighbor's life; I am the LORD.*

*<sup>17</sup> "Do not harbor hatred against your brother. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. <sup>18</sup> Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*

When you are sinned against there is to be no letting being wronged fester into hatred or grudges

And because you love them as yourself there is to be no letting them continue in sin, sin which will exclude them from Jesus people

And there is to be no public shaming

*go and rebuke him in private.*

Addressing sin starts with the individual sinned against

If you are sinned against you take it up with them

Don't run to someone else

Take it up for good of offender – to stop them sinning

And for your good

Stops nursing the hurt

OR just drifting away

You rebuke them – that is you show them how what they have done or said is inconsistent with what our Lord Jesus has taught us, and you call on them to change

This is the responsibility of each one of us relating to our brothers and sisters

We can't be indifferent to their sin

Or lazy in addressing it

For sin is serious

But having recognised it is the responsibility of each of us, we also have to recognise that there are some circumstances where it is not the responsibility of the wronged person to take it up with the person who has wronged them

In context, Jesus is talking about a relationship between brothers and sisters

That is, while it will be awkward, there is an assumed equality in the relationship

But that is not always the case

People can be in dependent relationships – for example, children to parents

Or people can be in relationships of significant power imbalance – like many wives in abusive relationships

Or people can be in situations of repeated threats and harm, where it is unsafe to rebuke the person wronging them

Even in churches there may be a significant power imbalance that can make someone feel unable to rebuke the person wronging them

For example it might be a minister or elder – and they may not even be aware of the imbalance.

But the wrong still needs to be addressed [1 Tim. 5:19-20] – for sin is serious, and in these circumstances can be even more destructive

IN these situations it is right to raise it with another, to seek help, and sometimes protection

May be raise it with another believer

Or a pastor or elder

Or Safe Church – on the notice board

WE are a community committed to Jesus' standards, and sin can't be tolerated

Now, Lord willing, you rebuke your brother or sister, and they listen – and heed – stop, change their behaviour

Result – you have gained your brother or sister

That is, you have kept them in Jesus' flock – and that is a wonderful outcome

But Because sin is about objective right and wrong if the person doesn't listen to you there is a next step

*16 But if he won't listen take one or two others with you so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established.*

You go with two or three others to rebuke their sin.

We are not to give up if rebuffed, because sin is serious, it kills

Instead you support your understanding that the action was sin by taking 2 or 3 others

People who can say – this is not just a matter of personal opinion, not just someone being sensitive – what you did was wrong

It's wrong to lie

It's wrong to take money for a job and not do it

It's wrong to treat a parent disrespectfully,

Jesus' community practices what was taught in Deuteronomy, that conviction should come with 2 or 3 witnesses, but here witnesses not to the sin, but to the understanding from Scripture that the behaviour is sinful.

*Deuteronomy 19:*<sup>15</sup> *"One witness cannot establish any iniquity or sin against a person, whatever that person has done. A fact must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.*

[This is practiced in NT churches

*2 Corinthians 13:* *This is the third time I am coming to you. **Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.** <sup>2</sup>I gave a warning when I was present the second time, and now I give a warning while I am absent to those who sinned before and to all the rest: If I come again, I will not be lenient,*

1 Tim. 5:19-20]

Taking two or three others does escalate the situation, makes it more serious

Others involved

You have subjected your sense of offence to the scrutiny of others

And the other person is now exposed to the judgement of others

So why involve others?

IT is because others are involved

The sin of any believer affects the whole community

Paul acknowledges this in 1 Cor. 5

*1 Cor 5:*<sup>6</sup> *Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough?*

Persistent sin, even if it is against just one believer, is a community issue, it effects others, and taking others recognises this, that sin in the community of Jesus' people is not just a private, personal matter

And the community, in NT as in OT, is expected to deal with the matter

And so give another opportunity to repent, for the offending brother to be kept

It says to them

You can't shrug this off, think it is just them being sensitive, or that it doesn't matter

Hopefully going with others jolts them out of their complacency, or give them conviction that they have done wrong

But what to do if the offender still won't listen, if they stubbornly insist on their right to do as they please?

It is a community concern, and now whole community is to make it clear that the behaviour is sin

It is a community concern

For not only does the sin imperil the life of the believer, threaten them with perishing

It harms the Christian community if not confronted – suggesting to others that this sin is not serious, that they don't need to pay a price to deny themselves this sinful behaviour – so it threatens the holiness of God's people

Threatens to undermine the rule of Jesus through His word amongst His people – and so threatening their identity as Jesus' people

And it can bring shame on the community in the world – especially if it is a behaviour the world despises, or at the least exposing the community as hypocritical.

*17 IF he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you."*

If there is persistent sin, persistent disobedience to Jesus' word, the whole church is to take action.

Now we usually do this through elders, and often in private to promote the opportunity of repentance, if it is a private offence. But at times it must be a public process for the good of all.

Now this is serious, for all involved.

But Jesus expects the church to take action

For good of offender – for sin is deadly

But also for good of community – reputation and well being

And good of world – reputation of the saving message

The action anticipated is disassociation, most clearly seen in exclusion from the Lord's table

They are to be like a gentile and a tax collector, people who were outside the community of God's people, who have no part in its life

This action makes it clear to the offender that you cannot continue in that sin and reckon yourself a part of Jesus' people, reckon you are amongst those saved by Jesus

IN fact so important is it that the offender gets this message that in 1 Cor. 5 Paul says

*1 Corinthians 5: <sup>11</sup> But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person.*

It is no love to let someone think they will be ok at the judgment, when their behaviour says they won't

And disassociation makes it clear both to other believers and to the world that Jesus' people have nothing to do with this kind of behaviour

And the Lord continues by making it clear that the judgments of the church, where they conform to the gospel, are the judgements of God

vv. 18-20

*"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will have been loosed in heaven. 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.*

'Will have been bound in heaven, will have been loosed in heaven' tells us that in conforming the behavioural boundaries of the church, of Jesus' community, to Scripture the church is ratifying, administering, the judgements of the heavenly court

It's a reminder that the standard is the word of God, that our life together must be regulated by what Jesus has taught, and also a reminder of the seriousness of the church's decisions

Conformed to scripture it is the judgement of God

It doesn't mean the church's judgement is final, for the next part of the chapter tells us there is always forgiveness for the repentant

But its judgement is serious

V. 19 reinforces that.

Again it is two or three – the judgment is not just of the one, but where it is agreed by God's people and they commit their judgment to the Lord – it will be done for them by our Father

Or perhaps where they are praying, even as they exclude from fellowship, for the repentance of the offender they are assured their action will have its goal, of not letting that little one perish

v. 20 – again brings home the seriousness of what is being done, and that the church belongs to Jesus, and He is present.

WE see that in Revelation where Jesus stands amongst the churches [Rev. 1:12-20], stands amongst them to both support and pronounce judgement

Our Lord is actively concerned for health and reputation of His people, and wants them to live as His people, and that should be an encouragement for all of us who want to live as His people, and a sobering warning to all who want to live in the church as if they are the boss, as if it is their club, their possession

Jesus expects His community to have clear behavioural boundaries, that it is not to be a place where sin is tolerated, where behaviour inconsistent with being His must be addressed

By each one of us

And that is going to be a challenge, for if we live by Jesus word we will be increasingly differentiated from the world, different from the society around us, whether that is in our sexual morality, as in 1<sup>st</sup> century; or our insistence on integrity; or our rejection of greed; in any number of ways

And there is pressure, always, – internal and external - to not maintain the boundaries, the behavioural standards, Christ has given us.

You see some examples of the Internal pressures to compromise 1 Cor. 5 –

Not wanting to act because of the status of the person, in Corinth the perceived value of the politically powerful person who was in an incestuous relationship with his step mother.

Fear of Litigation by the litigious who won't respect the judgements of the church

Or the accepted nature of the sin amongst many in the congregation – in the Corinthian case of sexual immorality,

And there will be External pressure not to maintain Christ's boundaries– legislation, threats of withdrawal of funding



And we might be personally reluctant to rebuke sin, remembering Jesus' warning about the log and the speck, conscious of our own sins

But the Lord is not here talking about looking for sin, but how to respond when you have been sinned against, when sin has found you

*Matthew 7: 3 Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the splinter out of your eye,' and look, there's a beam of wood in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother's eye.*

But individually and collectively we should practice what Jesus' teaches here – because He teaches it, and He teaches it for our good

And it is for our good – for it is good to live Jesus' way, it is the way of human flourishing. Good to love our enemies, good to control our anger and seek reconciliation, good to live sexually pure lives, good to true to our word

Jesus' way, his righteousness, is good

And maintaining Jesus' boundaries Maintains us as Jesus' flock – where He decides who is in and out, and we are nothing, not even a good human club, if we are not Jesus' people

And because sin kills, to take sin seriously, to insist that sin be repented of is

Good for offender

Good for congregation

Good for the world – who shouldn't be confused about what it is to follow Jesus, nor be turned off by bad behaviour being tolerated

When we think and talk about this we often become focused on the most serious end – dealing with persistent open sin and disassociation from those who persevere in there sin

But the determination to not let any perish because they keep on sinning starts with each one of us

Each of us having relationships with each other that allow us to bring up behaviour, and to hear others speaking to us about our behaviour

Starts with us being like the Psalmist who can pray

*Psalm 141: 5 Let the righteous one strike me—*

*it is an act of faithful love;*

*let him rebuke me—*

*it is oil for my head;*

*let me not refuse it.*

*Even now my prayer is against*

*the evil acts of the wicked.*

Do you love brother or sister enough to speak when they sin against you?

Love congregation

Love God – enough to take sin seriously?

But if we are to be a congregation with clear behavioural boundaries, we mustn't be a congregation with limits on forgiveness

### **But if Boundaried, not limited**

Vv21-22, 35

*Matthew 18: <sup>21</sup> Then Peter approached him and asked, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? As many as seven times?"*

*<sup>22</sup> "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.*

Peter has kind of got the point.

The rabbis said that forgiving up to four times was generous.

But Peter, knowing that God doesn't want one of his little ones to perish, is extra generous

Must I forgive as many as seven times. That would make us much more inclusive.

But Jesus answer is crushing

*<sup>22</sup> "I tell you, not as many as seven," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven.*

Jesus is not saying you have to keep extensive records to tally up the episodes of forgiveness and send someone a warning when they get to 469.

Jesus is saying that you must forgive without limit

And that is challenging, for forgiveness is hard. IT costs –

TO forgive a debt, is to go without that money

TO forgive a hurt, is to go without vindication

And to forgive Repeated offence

Wearing

Makes you doubt their repentance, makes you think you are being taken for a ride

Want to protect yourself from repeated hurt, or the reputation of community

But the Lord Jesus tells a story to make His point that to belong to His community is to belong to a community of the forgiven that forgives

That we don't have the option of being more exclusive than Jesus is, that those whom HE forgives we must forgive

Great story – full of exaggeration

First hearers would have recognised Jesus is telling a story about the Gentiles and their kings, and the fabulous wealth that these administration could have,

The King initiates his annual accounting from his servants

And he comes to one who owes him 10,000 talents

We're not told how he accumulated this debt.

But we do need to reckon with its amount

Needs a bit of maths to bring it into today's figures

A talent could vary in weight, but a common one had 6,000 denarii, and a denarius was a day labourer's wage.

So allowing for a day off a week a labourer would earn, let's say 320 denarii a year, and you could think of that as a basic, minimum, wage.

So in one talent there was 18.75 years worth of wages. In two talents there would be a life time of work

So ten thousand talents is what it would take 5,000 labourers all their lives to earn

To get a sense of the amount let's put it another way

The minimum wage is \$20.33 an hour, \$772.60 a week, which works out at \$40,175.20 per annum

So the equivalent buying power of a talent, 18.75 years of a labourer's pay, would be \$752, 285.

10,000 talents equivalent buying power then is \$7, 522, 850, 000

This is a big debt, and selling the bloke and his family wouldn't put a dent in it – the most expensive slaves sold for a talent, and most a lot less

So the servant is looking at a life time in goal

But v. 26 he appeals to his master, the king

*Matthew 18: 26 "At this, the servant fell facedown before him and said, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 Then the master of that servant had compassion, released him, and forgave him the loan.*

And amazingly – the master has compassion and forgives him

Now that would cost, even the greatest monarch

TO give you an idea

The annual revenues of the region of Judaea, Samaria, Galilee – that region combined, were 800 talents

But the King does forgive – it is extremely generous

And all this bloke has done is distinguish himself by his – greed, stupidity and unreliability

That is what the first hearers would have thought – to accumulate that much debt!

But he is forgiven

You would think it was a life changing escape – but he is still greedy and, to be honest, stupid – the stupidity of being pre-occupied with yourself

*Matthew 18: 28 "That servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him, started choking him, and said, 'Pay what you owe!'*

A hundred denarii is not insubstantial.

A third of the minimum wage, about \$13,000.

But compared to what he had been forgiven? It is 1/600,000, or .00000002%

This other servant, not of the man, but of the king – appeals to the forgiven servant with exactly the same plea, a plea for patience – which falls on deaf ears.

*Matthew 18: 29 “At this, his fellow servant fell down and began begging him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ 30 But he wasn’t willing. Instead, he went and threw him into prison until he could pay what was owed*

The other servants are scandalised and report it the King, who is enraged

*32 Then, after he had summoned him, his master said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Shouldn’t you also have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And because he was angry, his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured until he could pay everything that was owed.*

The King forgave that first servant a debt he could never repay, but he does not forgive the servant his lack of a generosity that was in his power to show.

*35 So also my heavenly Father will do to you unless every one of you forgives his brother or sister from your heart.”*

God is clear.

No matter how many times, no matter how hurtful the offence

TO be forgiven, is to forgive

TO experience God’s patience and kindness, is to be committed to showing patience and kindness

And it has to be genuine, not show

The forgiveness from the heart that frees from the debt, from the obligation,

The forgiveness from the heart that has embraced grace as the foundation of all our relating

To feel the power of this story you have to reckon with the comparison in what was owed

The Lord Jesus is saying that everyone in His community is to know themselves as the greatly forgiven, that we are to think our ourselves as being in the position of the first servant

Knowing we had a debt that we could never repay, and to have had it forgiven

And that is the truth

Scripture says the wages of sin is death, and we have earned that wage over and over again

We owe God our life, repeatedly

And God’s laws punishment for sin is not arbitrary – sin is deservedly condemned

Think of what our sin does to others and God’s world.

It is no accident our world, and people’s lives, are the mess they are

We are responsible for the destruction of the forests, the loss of species, the desertification of pastures

Our lies deceive and destroy trust

Our lust sustains the porn industry and worse

Our greed threatens the sustainability of life

Our indifference leaves others in poverty

Our love of power generates conflict, in the home and between nations

Sin is not trivial

And think of God's goodness to us, giving us life and everything we have – our senses, our intelligence, our abilities – and yet like the son in the story of the prodigal we hate the Father who has given us everything so much we can't wait for Him to die, want him as much out of our lives as possible, want to take the good He has given us and use it however we please, wasting it on things that let us down and impoverish in the end

Our sin deserves death. We owe God our lives

But to be a believer in Jesus, to belong to the community of the Lord Jesus

Is to be amongst those who are forgiven, who have no longer that debt of death to pay

To have been forgiven our pride, our lust, our greed, our anger, our lies, by God at great cost to Himself

That cost is not enlarged on here, but readers of the gospel know

Matt. 1:21 At the beginning the angel says You are to call Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins

*Matthew 1: <sup>21</sup> She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

Matt. 20:28 In Matthew 20 the Lord Jesus says HE will give His life as a ransom for many

*Matthew 20: <sup>28</sup> just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Matt. 26:27-28 The night before He is crucified we read "He took a cup, and after giving thanks HE gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

*Matthew 26: <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he gave it to them and said, "Drink from it, all of you. <sup>28</sup> For this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

How can the debt anyone owes you compare to the debt you owed God? No one owes you their life

How can anything you forgive compare to what God has forgiven you, over and over?

How can the cost of forgiving anyone compare to the cost God has paid to forgive you? The death of the beloved Son

To refuse to forgive – even though it may be costly to forgive – is to say that the wrong done you is greater than the wrong done God, the cost too much

Because –

Your dignity, your importance, is greater than God's?

Your rights more than God's?

At the heart of being the community of King Jesus is each one of us knowing that we are greatly forgiven, forgiven of a debt that really exceeds our imagination to compute

And that to be forgiven, is to forgive

We will be a healthy community if each of us remembers that every day

So that we always engage with others as the greatly forgiven

Engage with grace and patience, as those who have been shown grace and patience

Who have A joy in forgiving because we know the joy of being forgiven

For some of us that is easy

We know our sin too well.

We can't hide from the harm we have done others, the way we have failed them

Can't hide from the indifference or contempt we have shown God

And each day we are grateful to be forgiven,

But others of us can be forgetful

Pre-occupied with our own affairs, unaware often of the impact of words and actions on others

Too busy to pause to remember

Our gratitude is meagre, or absent

Engagement with sin, or forgiveness - shallow

Some resist acknowledging that they are the greatly forgiven - want to think they are basically good people, people who deserve to be treated well by God, have earned a place in the King's community by their faithfulness and righteousness, and insist others treat them with the dignity they demand as well

But they impoverish themselves

Don't know each day the joy of being forgiven people

The security of relating to the living God on the basis of His grace, not our deserving

And To forget or deny we are greatly forgiven will alter the character of our fellowship

Reluctance to deal with sin, or even think about its seriousness

A harshness in the treatment of others

A legacy of broken relationships not restored

Jesus people - It's not one slip up and you're out

It's not you're in subject to a trial period and can stay if you are good enough

Jesus' people are never to be an exclusive, self righteous club of those who keep the rules

It is the community of the forgiven who forgive

See how good that is

Don't have to hide sin, be reluctant to recognise it, because you fear you will be tossed out

Don't have to think you must be perfect to belong

You can be real about sin, and real about being sinned against

A community where you can slip up, as we will, but the slips not be fatal where sin is rebuked, and forgiven

A community in which you can grow in godliness, and we can encourage each other to grow

A community that can reconcile after hurt

Do you recognise yourself as greatly forgiven?

Is that the way you relate to your brothers and sisters who may well fail you, or wound you?

Are you longing to forgive when they repent?

Eager to show them the generosity you have received?

### **Conclusion**

The King's community – Boundaried – clear expectations that we will all be committed to speaking and acting in conformity with our Lord's instruction, and not tolerating sin amongst us

but not limited in our forgiveness, because we are the community of the greatly forgiven

This is the community that can bring back the straying

Protect each other from perishing from persistent sin

A community that can welcome all the sinners the Lord welcomes

Where the repentant can always find a home, encouragement

Where the word that saves is also the word that rules our life together

Let's ask the Lord that we would Love each other enough to rebuke sin

Be so conscious that we are greatly Forgiven that we gladly forgive