

## In Nomine Iesu

### The 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity, 2022 How much debt are you carrying? – Matthew 18:23-35

“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 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. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:23-35)

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who bore all our sins. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

People do not take sin seriously, neither their own, nor the sins of others that go on around them every day. It may be that they express indignation, even anger, at what they hear on television or read on the internet. But such hatred of sin glows hot for a time, but is forgotten until the next shocking outburst of sin and evil. People do not contemplate sin for long nor do they like to think about what might be at the root of evil. When it comes to these things our memories are both very short and very selective.

The same cannot be said for the evils and offenses which we ourselves have suffered at the hands of others. In this our memories are very retentive and we long remember what was done to us, whether it was actually done, imagined or, as is so often true, blown up out of all proportion to the original offense. In short we don’t remember sins committed against others; but those committed against us stick in our memory.

#### I

We see this truth illustrated in today’s Gospel text. In the parable Jesus shows us a man who owed his king an enormous debt. The man was very willing to defer payment on the debt he himself owed to his king. All he needed was time. He thought that he could pay off his debt. In other words, he had no concept of how serious his own sins were, how much debt he actually was carrying. But his king understood. His king knew that the load of debt was crushing, even if his servant did not. For the king kept accounts, recording each of his servants’ sins and their true cost to those of his other servants hurt by them.

So, when the servant left forgiven of his own debt, he had no grasp of the enormity of the debt his king had cancelled. And so, also, had no concept of debt itself, and proceeded to incur more debt to his king immediately when he came across someone you owed him. What happened? Jesus tells us, “He laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’” (v. 28) When asked to defer the payment owed to himself, the unjust servant refused and had the man thrown into prison.

Let's put ourselves in the parable, stand before our King, and be asked these questions by Him, "How much debt are you carrying? Do you know? You borrow from me with little thought, as if you were touching your credit card to the electronic device at the grocery store, restaurant or coffee shop, and then walk away with what you wanted. You hurt this other servant of mine - who cries out to me for help - and just walk away with whatever it was that you think you gained by hurting him or her. Do you know how much debt you are carrying? Do you not know that I will settle accounts in due time? All of them."

The king in the parable is of course God. In His justice He calls us to account for all we have done in our lives against each of our neighbors and against Him. He does this not just on the last day, the day when all will stand before Him for the final accounting, but in His mercy He sends us our bill just like Visa or Mastercard. This happens every time He confronts us with the demands of His law, which happens in one of two ways.

The first is when parents, teachers, pastors or others teach us directly from God's word the meaning of God's law and what it demands of us. This is by far the most effective training. It is also what God commands and urges those who have such vocations to do. If the law is truly and clearly taught, it should cause us to fear the wrath of God and to mourn our own sins. God's purpose in this is to show us our true condition, to show us the enormity of our debt, and to show us the true nature of sin and its origin, that is, that sin, and the evil which it produces in the world, originates in the human soul. God does this to turn us toward Him to find a solution to the condition of sin which has such power over us. And, let us understand well, the solution is not to ask for more time. That would be just like taking your Visa or Mastercard statement and throwing it in the trash, where you can forget it. But Visa or Mastercard won't forget.

In the parable the servant's debt to his master is so enormous that he could never pay it off. Ten thousand talents would be the equivalent of 660,000 pounds of silver. Never in a whole lifetime could we pay off such a debt. But with God there is forgiveness. He, as the master in the parable, is gracious and merciful. He forgives the sins of those who grieve over their enormity and turn to Him in faith seeking His mercy.

The second way God confronts us with His law is when we are threatened with death. When a person has a close brush with death or is faced with a situation so filled with danger, he sees his entire life flash before him in a moment. This is very common. It has probably happened to you. This is God working through natural law, that is, through the knowledge of the law He has implanted in your conscience, to make you look honestly at your life and your sins, before your account comes due. People in such situations often vow that they will be better or will change their lives in one way or another. The result, however, is almost always temporary, lasting only until we encounter the next person who owes something to us.

## II

In both cases, God desires that we turn to the promises He has given in His word, seek His forgiveness, and then go forth ready to deal with our neighbor in the same way God has dealt with us, that is, to be merciful. From this we learn two things about the nature of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. First, the forgiveness of sins is ours freely from God. But that does not mean it is ours cheaply. Our forgiveness was purchased with a great price. Our enormous debt was paid in full. But it is ours freely because God's own Son paid the great price for us with His own suffering and death. In His passion on the cross Jesus Christ was "delivered ... to the torturers until he should pay all that was due" for our debts. When He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," that is the sound of your debts being paid for ... most dearly.

To receive forgiveness from God thoughtlessly, as if it were actually something cheap and common, and then rush right back to our sinful ways without gratitude toward God and mercy toward others, as did the unjust servant in our text, is to mock God. And God, as we see from Jesus' warning at the end of the parable, will not be mocked.

Second, forgiveness must change our hearts and lives. Moreover, we should be under no illusion as to the true source of the change. It comes from God alone. We do not decide or determine to change our own lives for the better on our own. No, it must come from Him, from His forgiveness, however much we may think it is we who have changed our ways. That is why the master in today's text did not agree to His servant's request that he be granted more time to pay back the debt. The debt of his sin could not be paid back in a lifetime - not by him - nor by you or me. It is simply too great. We will fail. In addition, just as with any other debt, especially long-term debt, we would sooner or later begin to pay it back grudgingly. We would pay it back with resentment in our heart toward God and no real love toward our neighbor. And that is not Christianity, that is Pharisaism. No, forgiveness comes from God. It is the power of God unto salvation. It is a miracle of God that softens our hard hearts. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished," that was the sound of your far overdrawn account being paid in full ... and lavishly overpaid.

What a great privilege we have in praying, "Forgive us our trespasses," knowing that our King and Father does indeed forgive for sake of His only begotten Son, who paid all our debt. And what a great privilege we have in sincerely continuing, "As we forgive those who trespass against us." In forgiving our neighbor, we show ourselves to be true and merciful children of our merciful heavenly Father.

+++

So, dear hearers, how much debt are you carrying? In Christ you need carry none. In Christ you may come freely and often confessing your sins, whether in your own prayers to Your Father in heaven, or when we are gathered in Christ's name, where you will hear, "In the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And that absolution, dearly beloved children of the heavenly Father, is the sound of Christ Himself - truly, His voice - pronouncing your acquittal both on earth and in heaven before His Father. Amen.

**Soli Deo Gloria**