

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 18:23-35
October 27th, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

But That Servant Went Out

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred shillings: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay what thou owest.’ So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay thee.’ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Almighty God, we thank Thee that for Thy Son’s sake Thou hast forgiven us all our debt and graciously delivered us from the everlasting prison-house, and we beseech Thee, by Thy Holy Spirit preserve our hearts from ingratitude and wickedness, that we may not again provoke Thine anger against us, but gladly forgive our debtors, and at all times be assured of Thy fatherly mercy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dearly beloved and fellow poor, miserable sinners, the greatest gift anyone can ever receive is the forgiveness of sins. It is greater than gold or silver. It is greater than fame and honor. The forgiveness of sins is the greatest gift that we can receive, because sin is the greatest enemy that we have. Many pass over sin as something inconsequential. “Oops! I did a bad thing,” they think, or say. Very few people consider the consequences of sin. Sin is our greatest enemy because it leads to death. It is the cause of every death in the world. The leading cause of death is not heart disease, or cancer, or automobile accidents. The greatest, and only, cause of death is sin. This is why it should not be taken lightly. Sin leads to death, physical death, and the sin of unbelief leads to the eternal death of the soul in Hell. This is why the thing that covers over sin, the forgiveness of sins, is our greatest gift.

Consider the servant in today’s Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. This servant owed the king ten thousand talents. Now, the exact amount of a talent’s worth is unknown. It was based upon the weight of things, and as it is with monetary things, the amount changed with the times. The Revised Version of the Bible, which was published in 1896, in the footnotes, claims the cost of a talent was £240. I do not know what the conversion rate to modern money equivalents would be, but when nineteenth century carols and literature are singing about pennies and half pennies, a pound must have been very much. And a talent was worth 240 of those pounds in the late nineteenth century. That was just one talent, and this servant owed the king ten thousand of these talents. This servant of the king owed about two million, four hundred thousand pounds. That is a lot of money even by today’s standards, even if we equate the pound with a dollar. With inflation that number is probably equivalent to something in the billions of pounds.

In other words, this servant owed the king an insurmountable debt. Servants are not known for their huge wages. He probably only received room and board and a small stipend, at the very most. The point our Lord + Jesus is making with the parable is that this servant could never repay the debt. If the king did not forgive this servant's debt, he would be in debtor's prison forever. This is why forgiveness of sins is the greatest gift that we can receive. For if our forgiveness was dependent upon our working to pay it back; if it was dependent upon our meriting enough credit to pay back the debt of sin and shame, we would be bound in Hell forever.

Our sin is a debt that can never be repaid. Many people imagine that they can please the Lord God with their good works. Good works are a good thing which should be done, not because we owe it to the Lord, or because we believe we can earn His favor, but we do them out of our great love for Him. We love Him because He has shown us such great love in forgiving our sins. Through faith in Him we have learned just how great of a gift it is to receive forgiveness for our sins. We have learned through faith that we can never repay the debt of sin. We have also learned through faith the great consequences of remaining in our sins and unbelief. For the threat leveled against the servant is the same threat that we receive from the Lord God. The king commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and be placed in prison until he paid back the billion-dollar debt. The prison that we end earn on account of our sins and trespasses is death, and if we are unbelievers, we earn eternal death in Hell. We are never getting out of that prison, our debt is too great, our earnings too little.

But our Lord + Jesus shows us the Father's grace through this parable. Our Lord reveals just how loving and patient our heavenly Father is with us. For, this servant racked up a debt of ten thousand talents. This means that the servant kept coming back to the king to ask for more money, and the king freely and willingly gave it to him. It would seem from the beginning of parable that the king was even unaware of the amount of this man's debt, until he began to make a reckoning of the debt that was owed to him. This is how our Lord God is with every person on earth. He allows us all to rack up the debt of sin in our daily lives. He does not throw down a lightning bolt every time we curse out another driver on the road, or swear when we hit our thumb with a hammer, or our favorite team does poorly. He does not punish us instantly when we neglect to do good, or purposely treat other people poorly. He is a loving and patient Lord God.

Many want to point out the difference between the Old Testament Lord God and the New Testament One. They say He was a God of vengeance and punishment. But consider how patient and merciful He is with His very own people, the Jews. It was many years, many generations, of their disobedience and chasing after false gods, before He led them into exile. Even with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which never had a moment from the time of the division of Israel into two kingdoms in which they showed any sign of faithfulness to the Lord God, the Lord patience and mercy to several generations before they were exiled into Assyria. Judah also had several more generations after that where the Lord showed patience and mercy, sending His holy prophets to preach repentance and forgiveness, before their sins and false worship became too much for Him to ignore. He sent them into exile into the land of the Chaldeans, into Babylon.

This is how patient and merciful the Lord God is with us, and with everyone in this world. He has every right to destroy us instantly on account of our daily sins and trespasses; on account of all those sins which we commit every day which we do not even regard as sins, let alone acknowledge them when we commit them. As we learn in the Small Catechism we pray, when we confess our sins, that the Lord would forgive us of all those sins of which we are unaware, even as we do when we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." But even when we do confess our sins, when we acknowledge our trifling and small sins, which bear the same consequences as the great and horrible sins, the rest of the world does not. They truly like this servant from the parable. For they do not recognize how great of a gift that they have received. They do not understand that the forgiveness of sins is the greatest gift which they have received.

They do not even realize what a great debt they owe to the king, and how much He has granted them grace thus far in their lives. Thus, they treat their fellow man in the same kind as this wicked servant did his fellow servant who owed him a debt of an hundred pence. Again, the footnotes in the Revised Version of the Bible say that this debt was eight and half pennies. This is actually a debt that can be repaid. Most of us could probably repay this fellow servant's debt with the money we have in our pockets right now, and have money left over to spare. We could probably even find enough in our couch cushions to pay this man's debt. That the wicked servant, who had been forgiven so much, been forgiven a debt he could never repay, chooses to throw his fellow servant into prison to pay this payable debt, shows how unmerciful, unforgiving, and how evil he truly is.

This is a picture of the world. The world demands that no one accuse them of their sins and trespasses; that no one point out all the evil and horrible things they do, but they are all too quick to point out to Christians, when they have not lived up to the standards of the Law of the Lord God. They are quick to point out when they feel personally charged with their sins. They are highly offended when the Church rightfully points out their wickedness and shame. They become offensive and charge the Church with being a bunch of hypocrites. People who love to point out other people's sins, but continue to live in their own. We, however, know the debt that we owe could never be repaid. We, in faith, look for the grace and mercy of our loving and compassionate king and Father, who forgives us all our sins on account of our faith in Him. And because we know how much He has forgiven us, by faith in Him we gladly and willingly forgive the sins of those who have sinned against us.

That is after all how why the Lord + Jesus tells this parable to His Apostles. In the verses just preceding this pericope, St. Peter asks the Lord + Jesus how often he should forgive the sins of a person who has sinned against him. St. Peter offers what he believes is a truly generous amount: "seven times?" Our Lord + Jesus tells St. Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, not "seven times" but "seventy times seven." Whether we understand the Greek to interpret this as "seventy-seven" or "four hundred ninety," the meaning is the same. For we do not possess the ability to keep track of that many times that a person has sinned against us. Like our gracious, loving, and merciful heavenly Father continues to show compassion upon us and forgive us daily and often of our sins and trespasses, we also daily and often forgive the sins of all those who trespass against us.

This is why we pray this petition in the Lord's Prayer. When we pray to "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are not striking a bargain with the Lord God. We who are imperfect at best, could never appease a perfect God by our bargaining. If that petition in the Lord's Prayer is a contract between the Lord God and us; if our forgiveness is dependent upon how good of a job we do at forgiving other people, we are sorely doomed. For we know how much we hold grudges, and retain the sins of those who have sinned against us. No, my dearly beloved, my fellow poor, miserable sinners, when we pray this petition, we are asking the Lord to not only not look at our sins, but we are telling our Lord God that we also are showing the same mercy that He has shown to us. We are asking our Lord God to forgive all those who have sinned against. Therefore, having prayed thus, we have a clear conscience. For the Lord's forgiveness which we have received as the greatest gift, we also offer to our fellow man, to all those who have sinned against us.

The wicked, unmerciful, and unforgiving servant of this parable did not understand what a great gift that he had received. He received freely the full forgiveness of his sins. We have also received this greatest of gifts from our loving, heavenly Father; we have received the forgiveness of all our sins. The wicked, unforgiving servant chose to throw his gift away. He demanded the fellow servant's small, minuscule debt be paid back to him, when he had been forgiven a debt that would take several lifetimes to repay.

Therefore, my beloved friends, and fellow poor, miserable sinners, let us also remember the great gift that we have received from our loving, heavenly Father. He has given us the greatest gift that

we can ever receive, greater than gold or silver, or fame or honor. He has granted us the forgiveness of all our sins. Not because of anything that we have done, but solely because we cling in faith to the One Who has paid the penalty of all our sins on the tree of the holy cross. Our Lord + Jesus has offered up His perfect and sinless life as a ransom for our sins. He has paid the debt which we owe. He has paid this debt with His own precious blood.

Let us therefore come to this altar and receive the forgiveness that He won for us by eating and drinking the true and substantial Body and Blood of our Lord in bread and wine. For by this meal, we remember and proclaim that He has forgiven our sins; that He has won and given to us the greatest gift we can ever receive. And having received this great gift, let us also heartily forgive all those who have sinned against us. For by this meal, we learn to not only love the Lord God who has given us such a great gift, but we learn to love all those who He has also forgiven: our fellow poor, miserable sinners—our fellow servants of the king. By this salutary gift of our Lord's Body and Blood, we have the love of the Lord God, and learn to love our neighbors as ourselves.

How oft shall our brother sin against us, and we forgive him? The same number of times that we come to this holy altar to receive our Lord's forgiveness and grace. As often as ye eat this bread and drink this Cup, ye do show the Lord's death until He comes. As often as ye eat this bread and drink this Cup, ye receive the forgiveness of your sins. Let us therefore, daily and often forgive all those who daily and often trespass against us. For, we have been forgiven much, and they are indebted to us for so little. Instead of retaining their sins, let us rather share the great gift that we have received from our loving, heavenly Father and king, and offer that forgiveness to all those who have sinned against us. For, we have been rescued from eternal death and damnation, and by showing forgiveness in our lives to our fellow poor, miserable sinners, they learn to believe on the Lord + Jesus, and receive the same eternal salvation that He has bestowed upon us. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!