

“Your Debt Has Been Canceled”

Matthew 18:21-35

In last week’s Gospel lesson, Christ explained our need to confront those who are erring in sin. And when they repent of their sin, forgive them and remember their sin no more. Upon hearing this, our beloved St. Peter asks: “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? As many as seven times?”

Now, if you would forgive someone seven times for various or repeated things that they did to offend you, but on the eighth occasion, you decide that “enough is enough” and you exact your vengeance, most people would commend you for your patience. But Jesus explains to Peter that there is to be no limit to our patience and forgiveness with sinners who repent. There is to be no limit to our patience and forgiveness, because God has shown that there is no limit to His.

In the parable that Jesus uses to explain this, there is a servant who owes his master 10,000 talents. A talent is a monetary unit worth about 3000 shekels or 20 years wages for an

average laborer. So this servant owed his master 200,000 years of labor. This servant owed his master an inconceivable amount of money. To put it into our terms, if you use \$50,000 as an average wage, this servant owed his master \$1 billion. There is no way that this servant could possibly ever pay back a fraction of what was owed. His only chance was to throw himself on the mercy of his master. His master showed generosity almost beyond belief. His master took pity on him, canceled his debt, and let him go.

You are that servant. You have been forgiven a debt that you would have no chance of ever repaying. It is forgiven solely through the mercy and graciousness of our Master. Christ canceled your debt. He paid for it with His own blood. Now that your entire debt has been canceled, Christ says: "Go and do likewise." We forgive others because God first forgave us. We love others because God first loved us. That is the only way in which we can demonstrate to God that we trust in the reality of our own forgiveness, and that His forgiveness is valued and cherished in our lives.

We often find it difficult to forgive. As an individual; as a nation; we trust in the reality of our own forgiveness, and demonstrate that God's forgiveness is valued and cherished in our

lives by how we forgive others. As I said last week, if someone sins against you and that sin changes your relationship with that person, you only have two options that are pleasing to God – you forgive, forget and remember that sin no more. Or you go and speak to that person, show them their sin, and win back your brother.

In the parable we hear today, the servant who was forgiven did not understand the connection between justification and sanctification. Justification is being declared justified, righteous, innocent, debt-free. Our sin is placed on Christ; Christ's righteousness is placed on us. We are justified, forgiven, and the Lord remembers our sin no more [Jer. 31:34]. However, in our parable, this justified servant did not understand what it meant to live a sanctified life.

Being sanctified means to be made holy, pure, and set apart. It means doing the will of God as we are inspired to do by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace, and following the example that Christ has set for us. Because of sin, we have potential relationship-changing words and events every hour of every day. As long as we are in our flesh, Satan will continue to tempt us, and we will continue to fail. He drives wedges between you and your family and neighbors to the point that it can be easy to say, "It's not

worth the effort.”

Asking the Holy Spirit to give you the strength to live a sanctified life is worth the effort, because it is the way in which we demonstrate our faith in God and our love for God. If God had not placed the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve could never have demonstrated their love and devotion to Him. Unfortunately, their love and devotion for each other surpassed their love and devotion for God.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant, the master calls the servant “wicked” because the servant did not forgive his fellow servant. He did not follow the example that the master had set for him. The servant viewed the master’s gracious act as being cheap and therefore unworthy of any further attention. In doing this, this wicked servant forfeited the forgiving word of his master and forfeited the loving relationship that his master had established.

When your Master canceled your debt, He expected your life to change. He expects us to strive to do His will. When we fail to do His will, He expects us to repent of our sin and pray that the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to resist temptation in the future. Also, He expects you to demonstrate your trust in His forgiveness by forgiving the other servants who have sinned against you in some

way.

Your debt has been canceled. It has been deleted from any record that God keeps. That is a good thing. In Matthew chapter 12, Christ gave a warning to all of those who remain unrepentant in their sin. He said: "I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

Every sin; every careless word will be accounted for on judgment day. Not only every blatant act of terrorism or murder but every time a person carelessly says: "Oh, my God!" or "thoughtlessly demands God to damn something." For those who have not had their debt cancelled, God has kept a record of every sin of thought, word, and deed.

That is why each Sunday, we come before our Master and say: "I am a poor, miserable sinner." Like the servant in the parable, we beg of our Master: "Be patient with me." And like the master in the parable, God cancels our debt; wipes our record clean. On Judgment Day, God's faithful servants will have no record of any sins. Christ has canceled that debt for us. Unlike those outside of Christ's Church, we will not have our debt of sins announced before Christ the Judge. God remembers those sins no more.

As faithful servants of the Master, we are now commanded to

not only forgive one another through our words, but we are called to forgive one another in our hearts; to no longer feel any resentment for what has been done to us in the past – and in our minds, to remember their sin no more. The debt of sin that we owe one another in no way compares to the debt of sin that God has canceled on our behalf. Forgive one another, and rejoice in the forgiveness of God. Your debt has been canceled. Go in peace and serve the Lord. Amen.