

“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 or even hurt 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, to make the math easy, if you use \$50,000 as an average wage, this servant owed his

master \$10 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. This is the 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 others, especially when they have caused us real pain. As individuals, we trust in the reality of our own forgiveness and are thankful that God covers all of our sin and does not make public all the things we have done. The challenge is offering that same consideration to others and thereby demonstrating that God's forgiveness is valued and cherished in our lives. 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. That is what we heard Jesus tell us in last week's Gospel reading – also from Matthew 18.

In the parable of the unmerciful servant which we heard today, 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 violence, terrorism, 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. If you are not willing to confront someone and call them to repent of their sin, then your only godly action is to no longer feel any resentment for what has been done in the past – and in your mind, to remember their sin no more.

Not only is this the godly response, but if someone has hurt you and you sit and dwell on it and allow that hurt to tear you down, (which is what always happens when you allow such a thing to fester) then you are allowing them to exercise control, manipulate you, and continue to hurt you (living rent free in your head – as the saying goes).

The power of forgiveness is freedom – not just for you being forgiven by God, which is the ultimate freedom. But you forgiving others and remembering their sin no more gives you freedom.

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.