

The Christ-like Attitude in Forgiven Forgivers

16th Sun. after Pent. – 09/13/26 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 18:21-35 Pastor Keith Besel

Introduction

- ✘ The Constitution of the United States begins with these words, “We the people of the United States....” So, would you agree that “we the people...”; that is, you and me and every citizen of this country; that we are the United States?

➔ And so that means that every individual, tax paying citizen of this country – regardless of their political persuasion – shares in our country’s 40.1 trillion dollar debt (as of 9/12/26 - <https://usdebtclock.org/>). That’s a 40 with 12 zeros behind it; a number that is beyond our ability to comprehend. That means, that as of yesterday, if you pay taxes, your personal debt responsibility is over \$360,000. That’s more than 1/3 of a million dollars.

- ✘ But my friends, that’s mere peanuts compared to the debt that you and I owe to God. Yes, you are in debt to God because you owe a penalty – a penalty for sin. And in the eternal scheme of things, that debt is far more than \$360,000. It’s even more than 40 trillion dollars!

➔ So, the real question today is this: How are you going to get out from under that debt before God?

- ✘ In our Gospel Reading from Matthew today, Jesus answers that question. And while He does, He also puts into perspective, the debt of sin that others owe us and how you and I, as Christians are to respond to that debt. He does it by telling a story, a parable about a master and his servant that applies both to our relationship with God and with those God has placed in our lives.

I. A master extending/withholding mercy

- ✘ So, let’s consider Jesus’ parable. He tells the story in response to Peter’s question in verse 21, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

➔ Clearly, Peter thought this was a generous, high-minded number of times to forgive someone. Notice, as with almost all people, Peter still believed though, that there was at least, some kind of limit on forgiveness. And so, Jesus’ answer must have blown Peter’s mind, just as it does for most of us today: “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven” (v. 22). In effect, Jesus is saying, “If you’re really looking for a number, try 490 times!” But He uses that number only to make a point. What Jesus really wants Peter, His disciples and all of us Christians to understand is this: When you forgive, don’t keep count; there is no limit – just as God forgives you without limit.

- ✘ Then Jesus follows that answer up with an illustration. He even tells us His point in verse 23-24: “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”

➔ Now, you and I won’t grasp the immensity of this debt unless we understand what a “talent” is. In the 1st century, an average laborer would need to work 6,000 days to earn a single talent. That’s more than 16 years. Multiply that by 10,000 and you have 60 million days of work! No doubt, when those around Jesus heard Him say the man owed that much, they either gasped or laughed at its absurd immensity.

- ✘ The point is – this is an impossible debt to repay. The servant couldn’t do it. And so, verse 25 says, “And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children

and all that he had, and payment to be made.” If the servant couldn’t pay a thousand lifetimes of wages, he would still have to pay what little he had from his one lifetime in slavery.

➔ Amazingly, the servant begs for a time extension: “So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything’ ” (v. 26). Of course, it’s ridiculous that this servant thought he could pay all his debt. Perhaps he just had no concept of the enormity of it or maybe he was just grasping at straws. But the master knew. He knew that the only way out for this man was through forgiveness. So he forgave the servant his impossible debt. Verse 27, “And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.” Instantly, out of the master’s undeserved mercy, that man’s debt was wiped away; it just disappeared!

- ✘ And how did that servant respond to this amazing act of mercy? For one thing, we don’t hear him say, “Thank you.” For another, he doesn’t act like someone whose entire life has just been pardoned. In fact, the mercy granted to him seems to have zero impact on how he interacts with and treats those around him.

➔ Jesus continues with the story: “But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe’ ” (v. 28). You see, a denarius was a day’s wage, and one hundred of these would equal about 1/3 of a year’s wages. That is *minuscule* compared to the amount he first owed the master! In fact, it is 1/600,000 of the debt that had just been forgiven this thankless servant! Well, the other servant pleads for an extension of time, just as this first servant had done before their king. Yet, in this case, no grace is given. Instead, the poor man is thrown in prison “until he should pay the debt” (v. 30).

- ✘ When the report of this despicable act reached the ears of the master, he was furious! Verses 32-34: “Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.”

➔ It’s interesting to note that the Greek word translated as “jailers” (βασανισταῖς / basanistais) does not describe just an ordinary prison guard. Instead, the βασανισταῖς had the special function of torturing the deserving prisoners. Clearly, that thankless servant did not appreciate or learn anything from the king’s immense forgiveness. The reality is, this servant removed himself from the king’s mercy; having a hardened heart and refusing to be changed by the king’s forgiveness. And that’s the end of Jesus’ story.

II. Jesus’ parable applied to you/me today.

- ✘ So, what does this parable mean for you and me today? Jesus always told His parables to impart some particular truth of importance for the lives of those listening to His Words. And, Jesus tells us how He intends us all to understand his parable in verse 35: “So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

➔ This story speaks then to our relationships with God as well as the way that we interact with and relate to others. Its topic is all about forgiveness, which remember, is the subject of Peter’s original question, “...how often” must “I forgive” my brother; that is my fellow believer in Christ.

- ✘ So first, what about our relationship with God? The magnitude of God’s forgiveness offered freely to all of us is beyond our ability to comprehend because the enormity of our sin-debt and disobedience toward God...it is more than we can grasp as well!

➔ Every time that we break God’s Law, we violate His will and we offend Him. So, our debt to God only continues to grow, owing Him a penalty for every one of our infractions. Justice

demands that “someone’s got to pay” for all of that wrong. So, day by day, minute by minute our account goes further and further into the red!

➔ And what is the penalty for sin? The Bible says in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” That’s not just our physical death but far more serious, it is eternal death; the never-ending torture of being forever separated from God! This is the immense debt we all owe. And like the servant in Jesus’ parable, there is no way we can ever pay it off on our own. It is impossible in any human or worldly way of accounting or justice.

✘ So, who pays that debt? God does! In the parable, the king freely forgives the entire debt of his servant. But the fact is that in forgiving 10,000 talents, the master paid 10,000 talents, didn’t he. Every bit of that money came out of his pocket!

➔ This describes the gracious act God took to forgive our immense debt of sin. It freed us, yes. But it cost Him dearly – the cost of His life in the person of His Son, Jesus! Yes, at the cross, King Jesus took our sin and bore our debt; paying for it with His own death. He silently and willingly went to the torturers; suffering hell itself – separation from His Father – for us; in our place. And now, “PAID IN FULL” is stamped on our account in Jesus’ own blood. Your debt of sin is wiped entirely clean; canceled in Christ!

➔ That’s the first application of Jesus’ parable, regarding our relationship with God.

✘ But it also speaks to our relationship with other people, especially those who have incurred a sin-debt against us. It clearly illustrates the appropriate response that we are to have toward those who have hurt, offended and treated us wrong. We are to forgive them! Why? How? because of God’s unlimited forgiveness that we have already received in Jesus Christ!

➔ But Pastor, you don’t understand what that person – my parent, friend, neighbor, boss, teacher, co-worker, spouse, sibling, child, relative, or stranger has done to me! And you know what? I don’t need to understand, because trust me, God understands, because those people, along with you and me have all done the same and worse to Him a thousand; no – a billion times over! And yet He offers His unlimited, full and free forgiveness.

➔ This is why we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt. 6:12). Jesus even follows those words up in Matthew 6:14-15 by saying, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” That sounds exactly like what happened to the thankless servant in Jesus’ parable today doesn’t it?

✘ But don’t misunderstand Jesus here. Our forgiveness of others is not a condition for God to forgive us. It is the result of God forgiving us the unfathomable debt of our sins. The King forgave the servant first, and it was only when His mercy was not appreciated and thrown away that the servant was justly condemned.

➔ Quite simply, Jesus intends – without giving any wiggle room for excuses, etc. – that we who have been forgiven by Jesus, should now be gracious forgivers of those around us. Why? because it’s the right thing to do! Notice I didn’t say, “The easy thing to do” or “the thing I even want to do” though with God’s help that forgiving desire will grow and mature within us.

Conclusion

✘ The fact is, God is no longer collecting from us the debt for our sins. He has already put it all upon Jesus, Who paid it all in full. So, in response to that great show of mercy and love, we no longer “keep count” or collect the debts of others in terms of the wrongs they have committed against us.

➔ For, when we receive God's forgiveness in humility and gratitude, then His forgiveness flows through us as willing forgivers of others. And now, just as Jesus forgives us with no limit, so there is no limit on our forgiveness of the sins of others toward us, whether it be seven times or seventy times seven.

- ✕ To follow Jesus in the joy of His gift of forgiveness, that's what enables and fills us with the unlimited joy and peace of being unlimited forgivers as well. This is God's two-fold gift of grace to you today; the gift of a truly "debt-free" life that lasts forever! Amen.