

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ 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.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 The kingdom of heaven is like this: A king began to settle accounts with his servants. A servant was brought to him who owed ten thousand talents. A talent is not a dollar measurement; it's a measurement of weight. This man's debt is beyond dollars and cents; it's into tons, literally. A talent is about 75 pounds. So, if the man's debt is measured in gold, he owes 375 tons of gold, at today's gold prices, roughly \$13 billion, which, earning \$30k a year, would take him 435,000 years to earn, let alone repay. For the sake of charity, let's assume he owes 10,000 talents of silver, roughly \$200 million. If he earns \$30,000 a year and lives on only half of that, paying the rest toward his debt, it would take him 12,000 years to pay off his debt. The world isn't even that old.

2 This is a ridiculous debt, a stupid debt, a hopeless debt. The king was more than fair in ordering the man and his entire family sold into slavery to pay the debt. But the

servant fell to his knees and pleaded, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." No he won't. He can't. The debt is way bigger than his lifetime, way bigger than his worth. And there is no middle way, no room for partial repayment. The kingdom of heaven is not like that. The kingdom of heaven is like this: out of pity, the king forgave the debt. Completely. Gone. Forgiven. The debt was so huge, the only one who could afford to pay it did just that. The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of forgiveness.

3 The servant, with his debt of 375 tons of silver just written off, blotted out of the ledger, forgiven and forgotten, goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him a debt. How much is the debt? A hundred denarii, or a hundred days wages, a large sum, but a repayable amount. He grabbed his fellow servant by the throat and demanded immediate repayment. Maybe his methods were harsh, but his demand was fair. The fellow servant had a legitimate debt outstanding, and it was perfectly fair to expect repayment. The servant fell down and pleaded, "Be patient with me and I will pay you back." In almost the exact same words, the servant pleaded for time to repay the debt. The only difference was that this debt was repayable; the servant's debt to the king was not. Nevertheless, when the man who could not pay his \$10,000 debt on the spot, the man who had \$200 million in debt immediately forgiven had his fellow servant thrown into jail until he could repay.

4 When the king heard of the servant's refusal to forgive his fellow servant, he 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?" So the king threw the man in prison until he repaid the insurmountable debt, down to the

last cent. He demanded what was fair from his fellow servant, so he got what was fair from the king. Jesus concludes, lest you miss the point, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

5 The kingdom of heaven is forgiveness. In Holy Baptism, God delivered complete forgiveness, full remission of your debt. Your debt of sin was insurmountable.

Repayment was impossible. So the Lord who delights to be merciful had mercy on you, forgave that debt completely. Now think of those who have wronged you. Their sins against you are real, no doubt. But compared with your enormous debt of sin against God, they are paltry. And yet, it would be fair of you to demand repayment, to expect those who have sinned against you to earn your favor, to do penance until the debt has been paid. It would be fair. But you do not live in a kingdom of fairness. You live in a kingdom of forgiveness. To demand fairness is to depart from the kingdom. Is your neighbor's repayment worth so much to you that you're willing to sacrifice the forgiveness your Lord has delivered to you and continues to deliver? That's certainly fair, but fairness is of a different kingdom, the kingdom of hell. You can demand fairness and refuse to forgive. You are as free to do that as you are free to go to hell. But it's not what the Lord prefers. Repent.

6 To refuse to forgive is to refuse to be forgiven. Either you live in the kingdom of Jesus where forgiveness is the way of life for those who have been forgiven, or you live apart from Jesus, where repayment for the full debt of your sins is required. The servant's refusal to forgive the debt of his fellow servant demonstrated he did not really trust the king's mercy, did not really believe the forgiveness.

7 The King is merciful. He reigns with mercy and forgiveness. The difference between the parable Jesus told and the real reign of heaven is that the debt wasn't merely erased. It was paid. When humanity couldn't pay the debt of sinfulness, or, rather, when God, whose defining characteristics are that He's slow to anger and abounding in mercy, loved humanity too much to ask repayment from her, He made payment in full by other means. There was only One able to pay this otherwise insurmountable, ridiculous debt. The Son of God took human flesh, was the only sinless human being, and yet was still completely God. His blood coursing from His body on the cross, pouring from the wound that marked His death, flowed all over the ledgers. Just like that, billions of dollars of debt, insurmountable records of sin, were covered over, blotted out with the indelible ink of the precious blood of Jesus.

8 That forgiveness is for you. It's full and complete. There's no partial repayment in this kingdom; it's all or nothing. And the sinless Son of God and Son of Mary has paid for your sins completely. The kingdom of heaven is forgiveness, not fairness. That's abundant forgiveness, more than you can even imagine. It's ridiculous mercy for a ridiculous debt. It's foolish really, this extravagant forgiveness. But it's yours.

9 Forgiven people live in the kingdom of forgiveness. Everyday you live in the reality of your baptism; there God didn't just wash away past sins but gave you new life in this kingdom. He sends pastors to you to assure you of that forgiveness, to speak the words of Jesus who shed His blood for you. Their "I forgive you" is full and complete forgiveness. And forgiven people, Christians living in the kingdom of forgiveness, gather around the Lord's altar. Here, those who have been forgiven taste anew the forgiveness of sins as they eat the Body of Jesus and drink His blood. Sure,

there will be impostors, those who refuse to forgive others and who will receive condemnation, not forgiveness, in this meal. But they are different from you, who although you don't refuse to forgive, find it difficult to forgive. This meal gives you the forgiveness which sets you free to give your forgiveness to others. Your debt has been paid, cancelled. So have those with debts against you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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