

September 14, 2008

Messiah

Pentecost 18 - A

Matthew 18:21-35

“A Life Consistent with Grace”

Introduction

1. Do you have any outstanding debts?
 - a. Maybe you have a large mortgage debt on your house
 - b. Maybe you borrowed money from a family member or a friend and you owe them back
 - c. Maybe you have a car loan, a bank loan, a home equity loan, and student loans
 - d. Maybe you have a Kohl's charge card, a Sears charge card, a Penney's charge card, a Tesoro charge card, a Target charge card, a Menard's charge card, a Discover charge card, a Master Card charge card, and a Visa charge card – and you have debt on every single one of them!
 - e. Have you added up lately how much you are in debt?
 - f. Just talking about it and just thinking about almost gives us a panicky feeling, like we can't breathe, like we're drowning!
2. This sermon is about debt
 - a. And when we talk about debt in 2008 – we cannot but help think about our financial debts
 - b. And even though there is application in this sermon about our financial woes – EVEN MORE SO – I hope to take your thoughts and daily practices on your personal finances, and apply them to A MUCH MORE SEVERE AND GREATER DEBT THAT INVOLVES EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US – the debt of SIN, the debt of SIN to GOD – against whom we sin
 - c. But even more than that – with what Jesus Christ does with our debt of sin – I want you to wrestle with this question: Is my life now consistent with God's Grace?
- I. **First – let us think about how Christ's life IS CONSISTENT with GRACE**
 - A. It all started with Peter asking Jesus this very simple question, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”
 - i. Let's leave the thought of financial debt for a moment and think about the debt of sin
 - ii. Peter's question was honest and sincere – he truly wanted to know how often God desired for him to forgive someone?
 - iii. Peter wanted to do the right thing –
 - iv. And Peter even uses the Jewish number that signifies “perfection” – as there are 7 days in God's perfect creation, Peter assumed that if he forgives his brother as much as 7 times – he was doing a good and perfect thing
 - v. For instance – Peter was a fisherman – if he took his fish to market and the merchant cheated Peter 7 times on what he gave Peter for his fish – if Peter forgave this merchant 7 times – was that the limit?

- vi. If Peter forgave the merchant up to 7 times- was he fulfilling God's law, and then some?
 - vii. And Jesus must have shocked Peter when he said, "Peter, not 7 times, but 70 x 7"
 - 1. Jesus was multiplying this perfect number of 7 many times over
 - 2. And Jesus was not saying 490 times...
 - 3. Jesus was saying, "Peter, you keep forgiving, and you keep forgiving – for this is living a life consistent with grace"
 - 4. My guess is Peter looked a little dumbfounded – like a teenager who looks at his father with that look, "are you crazy or what? 70 x 7 – what's up with that?"
- B. Jesus then tells the parable which has come to be known as the "Parable of the Unforgiving Servant"
- i. A parable is a "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" – Jesus is going to use this story, this parable – to explain what His grace is all about, and how our lives are to be consistent with this Grace
 - ii. There was a King who came to settle accounts with one of his servants
 - iii. It would be like all of our creditors at once coming to us and saying "ok, today you pay back everything you owe"
 - iv. This certain servant owed this king 10,000 talents
 - 1. In Jesus' day – 1 talent = 20 years of labor
 - 2. And so – 10,000 talents was 200,000 years of labor – that's how much this servant was in debt!
 - 3. He was in way over his head – He was living on borrowed time for quite a while it would seem
 - 4. He accumulated this debt, it was his own fault, and now he was called accountable, now he was called to take responsibility for his debt
 - v. But, of course, he could not pay it – there wasn't even a payment plan grand enough to pay back this much
 - 1. The king did what was legal in that day – he ordered the man, his wife, and his children, to be sold and to spend the number of years in labor it would take to pay the debt
 - 2. Even if the man had 10 children, with his wife – it would take from each of them 17,000 years of labor
 - 3. THE DEBT COULD NEVER BE PAID – they would be slaves forever – their life would no longer be their own!
 - 4. The servant fell to his knees, and begged him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything"
 - a. There was no way this man could ever pay the king everything he owed him –
 - b. His debt was insurmountable – it was much too great – it was virtually impossible to repay the king
 - c. The servant hadn't a chance – he and his family were doomed and destined as slaves forever!

- C. And out pity, the king released the man and forgave him the entire debt
 - i. This servant was free and clear!
 - ii. This was freedom for this man and his family – no strings attached!
 - iii. It's not like this man won the \$1 million case on Deal or No Deal – this man was handed 200,000 years of compensation for free!
 - iv. There was no payback, there was no monthly automatic withdrawal, there was no computing annual interest, there was no payment booklet
 - v. The king forgave the debt free and clear!

- D. Think of it – this 200,000-year forgiveness doesn't even compare to the debt of sin forgiven us by Jesus Christ
 - i. It is no fairy-tale, it is no myth, it is no joke, it is no legend, it is not made up, thought-up, or connived → the debt of sin is REAL, and it is eternal!
 - ii. The sin into which you and I are conceived places us – not into 200,000 of slavery – but an eternity, a time without end – into the eternal fires of hell
 - iii. But the KING, Jesus Christ, whom we owe our souls, comes in love and compassion, and pity – and takes the debt of our sins into His own flesh
 - iv. We think of our financial in this world and get nauseous – but our debt of sin is eternity x greater! –
 - v. Our financial debts are earthly and temporal, but our debt of sin is paid for a time without end
 - vi. And when we finally realize the horrible situation we are in – we drop to our knees and we beg God to forgive us; we promise to pay it back, though we can't; we vow to be better, but we can't
 - vii. And in pity and love for his own dear children – He cancels the debt of our sin, and sets us free
 - viii. Those words of Jesus on the cross, "It is finished" – was one Greek word, actually a financial word in that day, which meant "The debt is paid in full" – the debt is finished, nothing more needs to be paid for our sin
 - ix. Jesus paid everything, he cancelled our debt, He freed us from Hell, no longer slaves to sin, but children of God who have been given heaven for all eternity

II. The life of Jesus Christ, who is God come to earth IS consistent with GRACE; for Jesus is GRACE personified! - And in union with Jesus Christ – so now, in Holy Baptism, OUR LIVES ALSO ARE CONSISTENT WITH GRACE

- A. And now, this man who was forgiven 200,000 years of debt leaves the king and found those who were indebted to him
 - i. He found a man who owed him a 100 denarii

- ii. 100 denarii in Jesus' day was about 100 days of work – 1/3 of a year's debt
- iii. This man was forgiven 200,000 years debt, and now confront a man who owes him 3 ½ months debt
- iv. The man who was forgiven by the king took the man by throat, began to choke him, and demanded his payment NOW
- v. The man who owed 3 ½ months worth fell down and pleaded, "have patience with me, and I will pay you back" – a debt which was manageable and could be paid back
- vi. But there was no forgiveness, there was no mercy, there was no love – the man who forgiven 200,000 years labor had the man with the debt of 3 ½ months labor thrown into prison until he could pay his debt
- vii. It doesn't take a genius to see that this is NOT a life consistent with grace!
- viii. Was this man so cruel, and so evil, and so spiritually blind to realize how insignificant of a debt was owed him in comparison to the debt he was forgiven?!

B. Who owes you?

- i. Is it a mother or father who has abused you for many years?
- ii. Is it a husband or wife who treated you dirty in a bitter divorce?
- iii. Is it a child who was so rebellious and unruly?
- iv. Is it a brother or sister who won't speak to you over a mere inheritance from mom and dad?
- v. Is it a friend who stabbed you in back, so to speak, to get ahead, or to get the promotion over you?
- vi. No doubt, these things in life are so very painful, they affect our lives forever, they have the capacity to change us, to harden us, to damage us
- vii. But our debt of sin to the Almighty, Creating, Holy God is ominous, it is humongous, it is gigantuanous – compared to any debt owed to us on this earth
- viii. This is not making light of any sins committed against, but it is making us see our sins toward God for what they are!
- ix. All of us wrestle with this Lord's Prayer that says, "Forgive us our trespasses AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US"
- x. We are NOT praying, "Lord, forgive all those little trifle things I do against your Commandments"
- xi. We are NOT JUST PRAYING, "Lord, help me forgive those little things people say and do to me once in a while"
- xii. We are NOT praying, "Lord, understand that there are some things people have done to me that I just cannot forgive – certainly you understand"
- xiii. What we are praying is this: "Lord, help me to fathom how severe my sins are against you, and yet, as you have forgiven me through your

death and resurrection – help me to forgive ALL the sins that have been committed against me”

- C. We cannot talk about forgiving others apart from acknowledging God’s forgiveness toward us
- i. When I look at God’s command to forgive others, my soul cries out to God and says, “Lord, I am too weak; I cannot forgive; and Lord, I must confess, there are times when I don’t even WANT to forgive!”
 - ii. Now I have come to realize the depravity of my soul
 1. Now I have come to realize that no amount of money, or works can amend for my sinfulness
 2. Now I have come to realize how dead and fallen and cursed I am
 - iii. I have only one place to flee – in the arms of Jesus Christ, who extended those very arms to die for me
 1. He alone gives me the desire to forgive
 2. He alone gives me the power to forgive
 3. That’s why He invites me to this meal – to strengthen me, and to create in me a clean heart to move toward forgiveness and love for my neighbor – especially my enemy
 4. That’s why He washed me clean in the font – to turn my heart to heart of forgiveness from one that is hard and unforgiving
 - iv. When the wicked servant returned to the king, the king said, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And whole not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?”

Conclusion

1. The story of Joseph in our Old Testament Reading is a remarkable illustration of Jesus’ words in our Gospel Reading
2. Many years before, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery, where he ended up in Egypt
3. But God used Joseph’s life to do great things – and Joseph became second in command in Egypt
4. Later, when Joseph’s father died, Joseph’s brothers were afraid Joseph would not retaliate and harm them
5. To calm their fears, though humanly speaking, we would understand Joseph withholding forgiveness, yet Joseph said, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones”
6. Just as we have bitterly sinned against others, so we all have our stories of those who have sinned against us
 - a. Is there a debt to be paid us – NO, Christ has taken the debt of all our sins upon Himself

- b. A life consistent with grace is a life that says, "You meant it for harm, but God used it for good – I forgive you, as Christ has forgiven me"
 - c. "I forgive you for your 3 ½ months of labor; as Christ has forgiven me 200,000 years, no – Christ has forgiven me my eternal debt of sin"
7. We may live with earthly debt, for which we must take responsibility and strive to be good stewards...
 8. But NO LONGER do we live with the debt of Sin – it is paid in full; Christ has forgiven us all our debt; we are free and released
 9. And now – as the baptized children of God – our life is consistent with grace BECAUSE THE LIFE OF CHRIST IS CONSISTENT WITH GRACE. Amen.