

“Share the Freedom, Not the Slavery”—Matthew 18:27

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Share the Freedom, Not the Slavery”, is Matthew 18:27 → *Out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Dear Lord, so far today I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or over-indulgent. I'm really glad about that but in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed and from then on I'm probably going to need a lot more help. Thank You in Jesus' name. Amen.

This prayer reveals the struggle we have in our lives with sin, self-righteousness and forgiveness. It reveals just how serious our struggle with sin actually is. Yet it doesn't completely describe our struggle with sin because the moment we wake up we can have thoughts flashing through our minds that are filled with any number of those sins listed in this prayer!

We struggle with forgiveness at all levels of life. Whether it's the struggle with forgiving the person who has hurt us . . . to asking for forgiveness when we've hurt someone . . . to forgiving even systems and institutions such as the marriage that went amiss. When confronted with sin, the sinner usually tries to “save face” by justifying his actions in an effort to give good reason why people should forgive him. Aside from popular opinion which believes that I'm describing everyone else, you and I are that sinner.

At the same time, people expect to be forgiven when they have done something wrong . . . or at least expect others to overlook their errors and not hold them accountable for them. Our sinfulness also reveals it's ugly face when we rejoice in being forgiven and still refuse to forgive others who, like us, don't deserve to be forgiven.

Prompted by Peter's questions—*Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?* (cf. Matthew 18:21)—Jesus spoke a very pointed parable about forgiveness and the unlimited patience of God. Actually, Peter was being very generous with his offer of forgiveness based upon the Jewish Talmudic teaching which stated that the proper limit of forgiveness for your brother was three times! Seven times appeared very commendable!

Too many times we want to be “freed up” by being forgiven but refuse to “free” others who have wronged us by forgiving them over and over again. The parable is fairly simple. It's about a man who owed his master such a huge amount of money that it would have been impossible to pay him back. His master ordered he, his wife, his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant proceeded to beg his master to *have patience with him* so He could pay the debt. Matthew 18:27 says that *out of pity for him, the master . . . released him and forgave him the debt.*

Notice the mercy this master had on his servant. Did he give the servant that for which he pleaded? Absolutely not! His grace was so abundant that he gave him far more than he asked—**He canceled the whole debt!!** It is a picture of our gracious Father in heaven Who, as Ephesians 3:20 says, *is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power of His grace in Christ Jesus at work within us!*

However, the servant's reaction to such grace shows the depth of our sin when it comes to forgiveness. He went and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a few bucks, choked him, demanded that he pay him back, refused to listen to his same plea for patience and threw him into prison. Too many times we want to be “freed” from the wrongs that we've committed against God and others but refuse to “free” others from the wrongs they have committed against God and us by forgiving

them as we have been forgiven. And this even while we pray: “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us!”

Sin which is not dealt with properly **in God’s way**, whether it is sin that we have committed or sin that’s been placed upon us somehow, will breed itself throughout our lives. Forgiveness is what the Person & Work Jesus Christ **and** the Christian life is all about!

There is only one way to deal with sin properly—by “losing” your life in Jesus. Otherwise, sin will seize opportunities to breed, as depicted in the example of this servant who viewed forgiveness as simply a way to feed his own sinful flesh. After all, he saw a good “business” opportunity for selfish gain because if he could collect money from all his debtors that would translate into 100% profit in his hands! Sounds like a great opportunity at the expense of grace!! Your sin will breed itself and cause you to abuse grace if not dealt with properly in Christ!

When we refuse to forgive there are a number of very serious things that happen. You lose sight of the fact that you are a **forgiven sinner**. You must never forget that you are always a **forgiven sinner**. If you do, you are a very selfish Christian who sees God as existing to serve your own desires! Even the master understood the human concept of “pay it forward” when he said in Matthew 18:32-33 → *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?* A person who loses sight of experiencing grace will not show grace. They’ll recognize that they are **forgiven** but ignore that they are still **sinners**.

When you refuse to forgive you are also still enslaved to your own sin, your resentments and your victimizations of the past. 2 Peter 2:19 talks about those who live in such error promising *freedom*—that is release from the guilt of sin —*but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved*. If I refuse to forgive I am still enslaved to my own sin and bind others to their sin as well. Instead of releasing a person from the guilt and “debt” of their sin you bind them to that guilt and “debt.” Ever heard someone say, “I’ll never forgive you!” Did you feel free or bound? Refusing to forgive is a binding process and forgiveness should always be a freeing process!

When you refuse to forgive you also separate yourself from the LORD Who has done everything in Christ to free you in His forgiveness from the power of sin. Jesus connected the wicked servant’s actions in the parable to our relationship with our heavenly Father Matthew 18:35 → *So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, (i.e. punish you) if you do not forgive your brother from your heart*. So, when you refuse to forgive, you are separating yourself from the forgiveness that God has given you in Christ because you are saying that His forgiveness is not able to cover someone else’s sins but is able to cover yours. In effect, it is a denial of the atonement of Jesus **for all people!**

In the midst of such enslaving sin, where will we turn, not just to be freed from sin but to free others from their sin? How are you going to be freed from the slavery that Satan constantly puts on you, making you enslave others through un-forgiveness, rather than freeing others through forgiveness?

In Christ. God has set you free from your slavery to sin, completely and totally by His grace through the Person and the Work of His Son, Jesus Christ! God looks at you **in Christ** and says, “It’s finished! I’ve cancelled your eternal debt! **You are forgiven and free!!**” In John 8:34-36 Jesus talked about holding to His *teaching to know the truth that will set you free*. Being free from the burden of guilt and sin happens as a result of the eternal relationship through faith in Him as God’s Son. He says that *everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed!*

Being freed from the enslaving power of sin doesn’t happen by your trying to pay God back for a debt you cannot realistically repay. Being freed from the enslaving power of sin happens as you simply trust **in Christ** and who you are by **His** work and **His** power! Neither does freeing others from the enslaving power of sin happen by your own doing. It happens as you trust **in Christ** Who has dealt with that person’s sin once and for all as well! You don’t plead before God’s throne of grace saying, “Lord, give

me strength to forgive that person.” Rather, you come before Him saying, “Lord, I can’t do it. I need Your forgiveness for my own unforgiving nature. Only You can forgive others in and through me!” Your pronouncement of forgiveness to that other person is final and freeing because of Christ, not you!

How do you receive this complete and total forgiveness of God and His freeing power? We’ve experienced it through God’s initiative in the Person and Work of Jesus, appropriated to us through the Means of Grace. Jesus saw your helplessness in sin and dealt with your sin once and for all through His suffering, death and resurrection!!

Like the master in the parable, God recognized there was no way you could pay back the immense debt your sin accumulated before Him. Like the master in the parable, God has also given you more than you requested because He knows that it is impossible for you to make it right. He sent His Son to pay the debt for you with His blood and continues to distribute that forgiveness to you and through you amongst the gathered believers in worship through Word and Sacrament. **In Christ He cancel the debt of your sin!!** Forgiveness begins, continues and ends at the foot of the cross of Jesus!

When we come to Christ in confession we recognize that we are slaves to sin and that the only hope for us is His suffering, death and resurrection. We are even freed up in forgiveness to recognize, admit and be accountable for our own sin! We are also aware of our natural tendency to be self-righteous, admit when we are self-righteous and depend in faith upon the righteousness of Christ. Instead of trying to justify ourselves in the midst of all sin, we cling to the only justification for sin—Jesus and His atonement. The central teaching of Scripture is that we are justified **by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone!**

God tells us in Ephesians 4:32 to *be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*** You have received the total and complete forgiveness of God and thereby have Jesus’ victory over all sin! By the power of the Holy Spirit you continue striving to forgive others in your struggle with the presence of sin, constantly coming to His Word & Sacraments to experience the forgiveness of Christ anew! We gather here in this place to share the freedom as we dispense the forgiveness of sins to one another through the Absolution, the preaching the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Our purpose for being here in this place right now is to share the freedom, not the slavery!

You share the freedom from the guilt of sin because of the Person & Work of Jesus! Not because they deserve it; not because you can justify their sin in your mind; not because you’re such a wonderful person. When a Christian forgives, it’s powerful because of Christ in you! In Matthew 18:18 Jesus tells us, His Church, that *whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Forgiveness pronounced by Christians frees others from the burden and guilt of sin before God in heaven! That’s sharing the freedom of Jesus Who came to set you free indeed! Amen.

Colossians 3:12-13 says:

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,
bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another,
forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you,
so you also must forgive.*