

## That Much

Matthew 18:21-35

The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 17, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is hard to assess how much we owe the people against whom we have sinned.

If we have committed an act of violence against that person it is hard to begin to know how that violence affected them for the rest of their lives. If the violence was repeated, what we owe them is compounded.

If we have committed adultery, it is impossible to know how much we owe the spouse against whom we have committed adultery. It is hard to know the heartache that we have caused. It is hard to know the breach of trust that has been created.

If we have gossiped about someone and damaged their reputation, it is hard to put into dollars how much we owe them for the loss of reputation. Have we damaged their reputation such that they have lost friends? How do we make that up to them? Have we damaged their reputation such that they did not get a job? How can we repay them for the lost salary and loss of confidence in life? Have we damaged their reputation such that they have lost business or lost business deals? How can we ever fathom what we owe them for the things that we have said about them? How can we ever pay them back?

If we have cheated someone, we might be able to give a certain calculation on what we owe. And if you do make the calculation, are you going to pay interest and adjust for inflation when you do it?

Our sins have harmed our neighbors and even with our neighbors, sometimes people whom we love, we cannot calculate how much we owe them because we can never know the full extent of the hurt.

They might be able to express some of the hurt so that we might make a more proper confession, but a confession of sins does not make up for it. We temporal human beings cannot roll back the clock and redo our lives. Once we have disobeyed our parents we have disobeyed them. There is no way to undo it. Once we have murdered someone or hurt them physically, we cannot raise the dead or restore their damaged bodies. Once we have committed adultery we cannot take that action back and relive our lives such that we avoid it. Once we have stolen, even if we return it or pay for it, we cannot make up for the loss of it during the time it was in our possession. Does even paying interest on it really make up for it? We cannot go back and avoid the lies that we have told and avoid the gossip that we have uttered. And even our explanations of our actions, if we have any, do not make up for them. In fact an explanation or an excuse reveals that we are hypocrites. And the people whom we have harmed know how hypocritical we are because they know the full extent of the hurt that we have caused and they know that our explanations and excuses do not make up for any of it.

If we cannot know what we owe our neighbor when we sin against him, how are we ever going to know how much we owe God when we sin against Him?

God has given us so much more than our neighbors have. To sin against Him is a much greater offense. God has created us. To sin against Him is to sin against the creator. It is to rebel against our very being. How can one ever fathom how much we owe for our faithlessness.

In the final analysis all sin is faithlessness. If we really believed that God exists, we would not sin against Him. We would fear His wrath. We would heed His commandments. But we think that we can get away with it. And because we think that we can get away with it we do it. No one does something, if he knows that he will not get away with it. Those who sin think that they can get away with it. But if we

think that we can get away with sin, that means by definition that we either do not believe that God exists or we do not believe that He is holy or we do not believe that what He says is wrong is in fact wrong or we do not believe in His divine wrath. And since God has testified to His holiness, His wrath and has explained to us His expectations for inner life and outward conduct, when we sin we either do not believe that He exists or we believe that He is a liar. In either case how can we fathom what we owe Him? If we cannot conceive of what we owe our neighbor when we sin against them, how will we ever know how much we owe Him for any sins for they are all against Him?

Jesus tries to explain it. In short He calls it hell. We owe Him hell for our sins. And just so we do not forget what the Lord has testified regarding hell, I will repeat it again. Hell is the outer darkness. It is that state in which the damned find themselves when Jesus raises them from the dead. Their senses are impaired such that they are in the dark. They cannot perceive Him. They cannot perceive those who are saved. They cannot perceive anyone around them.

It is outer darkness. They are far away from anything. They are far away from God. They are far away from anyone else. They are far away from those who are saved. This is the result of God giving those who sinned what they wanted the most. They wanted throughout all of their lives control over their lives. They wanted to be the boss of their life without anyone else much less God telling them what to do or laying obligations of relationship upon them. God finally gives them what they want in hell. He puts them where they will be totally alone with no one including Himself to tell them anything or boss them around or lay any obligation on them whatsoever.

It is the eternal fire. They are in torment. They are in torment forever. It is a loneliness that burns and the fire never goes out. They are with the sins that they enjoyed so much in this life and they get to have them for all of everlasting time. The fire never dies.

The worm does not die either. The worm are those creatures that stir up the ground to till it and who consume the dead things so that there may be life in the ground. Our Lord testifies that the worm does not die in hell. That means that the damned are in a perpetual state of death. In spite of the fact that Jesus has raised them from the dead, He has only raised them into an everlasting status of death and dying. They will never escape the decay of death. The worm will constantly eat them and it will never die.

This is hell. This is what you owe God for your sins. This is what the divine justice demands for the things that you have done. Pay it and you will pay for your sins. But who can pay it?

If this does not concern you, then you are going to hell anyway and there is no hope for you unless you repent. If this does concern you, then take heart the master has pity and he has canceled your debt.

In the Lord's parable the slave owes the master 10 000 talents. That is actually a slight mistranslation. 10 000 in Greek is a myriad. Our Lord literally says that the slave owes the master myriads of talents. That means that at bare minimum, he owes 10 000 talents. He may easily owe 20 000 or even a million talents. A talent is a unit of weight. In English measurements it is seventy-five pounds. Therefore this man owes 750 000 pounds of gold to the master at least. The last I checked the price of gold stood about \$1 349 an ounce. I tried to do the math on my calculator and it gave me an error message. It comes to 14 billion, 754 million, 653 thousand, 775 dollars. How did he get into such debt? The Lord does not say in His parable. It is unspeakable.

In order to compare what the fellow slave owes him, he owes him a hundred denarii. A denarius is a coin that a common laborer in the Roman Empire earned for a days wages. For us it would be about \$80.

That means that this slave who was forgiven a debt of 14.8 billion dollars could not forgive a fellow slave who only owed him \$8 000.

Or some have combined both into working days. In other words some have asked how much does the first slave owe his master in terms of denerii. If the slave is a common laborer and there is no reason in the parable to assume that he is not it will take him 320 000 years to pay back his master what he owes. His fellow slave can have him payed back in a little less than three months.

I think by now if you have any faith at all in Jesus you have figured out what these amounts mean. We owe God a debt that we cannot repay. We would have to work for an eternity to pay it off and we cannot do that.

The first slave begs the master to have patience and he will pay it back. The master takes the slave at his word that he wants to pay it back, but knows that he cannot, so he cancels the whole debt.

Just as we cannot imagine how a single individual could owe so much, so also we cannot imagine how much the master gave up to cancel the debt. Think of what financial sacrifice the master made to cancel that debt. He and his heirs could have benefited from the slave and the slave's heirs for generations to come. They could have led lives of luxury on the backs of this man's heirs and done so under the full legitimacy of the law. He gave that all up.

Thus also when the master cancels your debt, you cannot imagine what he is giving up in order to cancel your debt for the only way to get your debt of sin canceled is to atone for it and the only atonement the Lord's justice and holiness will accept is a perfect blood sacrifice. The blood sacrifice must be enough to pay for an eternity in hell that each and every one of us owes to God. No one could pay it. Even when we want to pay it realizing some small part of what we owe we cannot do it. So the Lord canceled your debt and it cost Him the life of His Son to do it.

It is an unspeakable price. Even the Gospels do not go into gory detail about the crucifixion in order to show us how bad it was. There is no way for them to do it. They could not even begin to do it. They content themselves to record the facts and let God speak for Himself. He canceled your debt of everlasting damnation that you deserve because of how you have lived. The cost to Him for canceling it was the life of His Son.

What other people owe me for their sins against me pales in comparison to that debt. I am not holy. I deserve to have people sin against me because of my sins against others. Does it cost me to forgive someone of the sins they have committed against me. Sure it does. It hurts to forgive someone who has physically harmed us. It hurts to forgive a spouse who has committed adultery. It hurts to forgive someone who has cheated us out of a lot of money. And sometimes it hurts to forgive someone who has cheated us only out of a little money because of the principle of the thing. It hurts to forgive someone who has lied about us. It hurts to forgive someone who has betrayed a confidence that we placed in them. It hurts to forgive someone who has damaged our reputation and that damage cost us dearly in relationships and possessions. And that hurt is real. It is real pain.

But in spite of how real that hurt and pain is it pales in comparison to the hurt and pain of the loss of an only Son. It pales in comparison to the murder of an only Son. And that is what God suffered to cancel your debt. That is what it cost Him.

You know, I think what other people owe me isn't all that great. Even if they murdered my son that does not compare to the murder of the Son of God! I don't think that my losses are all that bad in comparison with the death of the Son of God!

And therefore anyone who has had their debt canceled by the master cancels the debts that stand against him. He does this because he realizes what the master has done.

That means that if a person is unforgiving, then they don't realize what the master has done. If they do not realize what the master has done to cancel their debt it can only be because they do not believe in Him. Only a person who denies that Jesus is the Son of God or who denies that hell is the proper place for those who owe God or who deny that what God has said is sin is sin will be able to take an unforgiving attitude toward someone else who begs him to forgive him.

And if anyone does not forgive someone who begs him to forgive him, then he doesn't believe in the master. How could he? If he did, he would be like the master. Such an unforgiving person deserves to pay God what he owes God and God will demand it from him for his lack of faith.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.