

"Sin's Delusions"

Text: Jeremiah 28:5-9

May God the Holy Spirit remain living and active in your heart, continually reminding you that the debt you have compiled by your sins has been paid in full by Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Forgiven Sinners:

In the first stanza of Hymn 324 in *The Lutheran Hymnal* we find this reminder:

*"Jesus sinners doth receive; Oh may all this saying ponder
Who in sin's delusions live and from God and heaven wander!
Here is hope for all who grieve – Jesus sinners doth receive."*

Concentrate for a moment on one phrase in particular from that hymn stanza: *"Who in sin's delusions live..."*

That is the thought, the frightening truth, that we will further explore this morning – the very real possibility of living in "sin's delusions" – of going about our day-to-day lives allowing our hearts and minds to be administered or directed by an alternate reality that does not find its basis in our Savior-God and his Word. The text that will establish and guide our study this morning is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 18th Chapter:

^{ESV} **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."*

These are the words of our God, given to us through verbal inspiration by the Holy Spirit. We are right to have great confidence in these words and in their ability to guide, comfort, strengthen, and inspire us – and to deliver us from any alternate reality. That our God would grant such blessings to each of us here this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

The first thing we would probably do well to substantiate is the fact that it is indeed possible to live in "sin's delusions." To do that, we will need to define and understand what we're talking about.

By "sin's delusions" we are really talking about an alternate reality – an existence where that which we believe to be true and accurate really isn't, yet we still hold to it. Is it even possible to live in such a state or condition? Of course it is. You see it all the time. You may even be guilty of it. We live, for example, in a society where a significant percentage of the population now sees themselves as victims. The basis for this worldview can be as simple as having someone tell you that you are, in fact, a victim. The evidence to substantiate that claim isn't really as important as whether or not you accept the premise. In other words, does the fact that my ancestors were abused, mistreated, or robbed make me, *today*, a victim? It doesn't matter. The only thing that really matters, when we are talking about *alternate realities*, is whether or not *you* believe it to be true. If you believe yourself to be a victim, in your mind you are, and that alternate reality then not only determines your worldview, it absolutely shapes and filters everything you experience in life from that point forward.

A few examples of how this works might be helpful here. Suppose you are speeding and you get pulled over. Because in your alternate reality you now see yourself as a victim, you find yourself absolutely

incapable of admitting that you could have done anything wrong, even though you obviously broke the law by exceeding the posted speed limit. You *cannot* be the one doing anything wrong because in your mind you are always and only *the one who is wronged* – you are the victim, not the perpetrator. The result is that even indisputable evidence no longer matters; it is trumped and erased by your perception of reality. That, in fact, is the very definition of the sort of delusion we are talking about – a state of mind that bends and shapes even *obvious facts* to fit your adopted reality.

Examples abound. Are weather extremes evidence of man-made climate change? Your reality provides you with an instant answer. Are school and other mass shootings the natural result of a lack of gun-control legislation? Should hunting be outlawed? What exactly now constitutes "hate speech"? Am I seeing peaceful protests or lawless rioting? Clearly alternate realities can devolve into silliness, but they can also be deadly serious – especially when we are talking about *sin's delusions*.

With that background, we turn again to our text. Though there is much to learn there, did you catch the rather subtle "sin delusion" that our Savior there identified? I'm guessing most did not, for several reasons. First, you were probably not looking for it. Second, because it was presented rather subtly. Third, and most importantly, *because a part of every single one of us exists in that same sinful delusion that blinds us to God's reality*.

The example of "sin's delusion" Jesus identified in our text is found in verse 26: ***"So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'"*** If you are still having trouble seeing it, one single explanation of just one point in Jesus' parable will instantly clear it up. ***"Ten thousand talents"*** was the equivalent of several million US dollars. As a servant, the idea that this man could ever repay such a debt was therefore delusional in the extreme, yet I have no doubt that the alternate reality in which he lived thoroughly convinced him that he could.

Obviously Jesus is not talking about a financial debt here but a sin debt. Man's natural alternate reality (part of our natural "sin-delusion") is that we can repay or make up in some way for all the times we have broken our God's commandments. Our text points out just how absurd that is in a number of different ways. First, the man had incurred the debt while earning the same amount he could expect to earn going forward. In other words, if he had gone into catastrophic debt on his current income

in the past, what would possibly make him believe that he could earn the same amount going forward and not only live on that income but also pay off his indebtedness?

Carry that into the spiritual realm as Jesus intended. Human beings live every single day of our entire lives committing sins. There isn't even a single day where we "break even," let alone accumulate any spiritual goodness that we can deposit into God's bank. We don't make monthly payments on our sin-mortgage *because we can't*. Every single day we just add to the debt side of the ledger.

And yet human beings, according to the alternate reality of our natural sin delusion, simply throw out or dismiss all evidence to the contrary and convince ourselves not only that we *can* repay our astronomical sin debt but that we actually *will*. What's even more disturbing is that in our natural state, before the Holy Spirit does his work in our hearts by bringing us to faith and opening our understanding, in that natural state we actually *believe* that we are capable of saving ourselves.

Consider for a moment just how powerful this sin delusion must be to so thoroughly blind us to the clear evidence that is all around us. Imagine you did the following to your neighbor: tore down his fence, coated his lawn and his flower beds with Roundup, spray-painted his walls with graffiti, stole his identity, hacked his home network, keyed his truck, and poisoned his dog. How many here would imagine that all will be made right if you would just leave a \$5 bill in an envelope on his front porch? No? That's nothing compared to all the ways we have sinned against our God, and yet somehow natural man actually *believes* that if God would just be patient with us, we could and would make full restitution for every single infraction – which is the absolute *ultimate* in sin-delusions.

Yet notice in our text how ***"the king"*** (God) in no way accepted his servant's delusional, sin-addled plan. He immediately saw it for the nonsense that it was. The servant begged for ***"patience"*** but the King responded with pity and forgiveness. Patience and forgiveness are two very different things. *Patience* carries the implication that man can eventually provide, while *forgiveness* implies that man can *never* provide. That simple fact is the beating heart of the Christian faith itself. Man's natural salvation plan is for God to simply be patient with him and he will eventually make up for all that he has done wrong and will himself provide payment for every infraction. God knows that no matter how convinced man is of how well that

plan will work, it cannot and will not. God's plan then is to demand no payment at all from the sinner, but rather to pay the debt himself. This payment God himself provided when his Son offered his flawless life on that hill outside of Jerusalem. There the Sinless was made to be sin in our place – in the place of every single human being who contributed to that load of sin for which Jesus paid.

As God's servants we therefore do not now petition our God for patience. Patience gains us nothing but more time to add to our debt. Having been extracted from the fog of our natural sin delusion, we now recognize that we will *never* have *anything* to offer a holy God in the way of a sin payment. Again, *patience* on God's part is absolutely not what we need, since it would only provide us with more opportunity to fail. In fact, we don't even pray for his *pity* in connection with our sin debt because when we look to the cross and the empty tomb we now recognize the *completed fact* of pity. Though we sin greatly every single day, the payment for every sin – past, present, and future – has already been made. God's pity is therefore an accomplished fact. Our impossible debt has been paid. As the servant in our text didn't need to continue to plead for the king's pity, neither do we. The debt is forgiven.

And yet what about the rest of our text? Having taught us about his undeserved mercy, does our Savior then throw the whole thing into doubt by demanding something from us – "*I'll pay this if you pay this; I'll forgive you if you forgive your neighbor*"? Is our sin debt then *almost* but not *fully* paid? Not at all. The full and complete payment was made by Christ and accepted by the Father. Yet human beings can still reject it, still refuse it. The servant's lack of forgiveness for his fellow servant is presented in the parable as evidence of lack of faith – of rejection and unbelief – not as a failure to do his part. Despite hearing the news of his Master's pity and the forgiveness of his own debt, his subsequent actions proved that nothing had changed in his heart, and because of his rejection and unbelief he was forced to pay the ultimate penalty. The man was living still in his own private sin delusion. And, by the way, the word translated "jailers" in our text doesn't quite do it. The word is "torturers." Unbelievers are, one and all, handed over to the torturers.

So what, in the end, are we to take from this text? First, recognize the possibility of living in your own false reality, and be reminded that only God's Word can be trusted to set you straight. Only God's Word is capable of clearing away the fog of our natural misconceptions. And the greatest message of God's Word is his pronouncement of mercy, he himself paying what we could not. When that divine reality, that message of sins forgiven by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, fills your

heart and mind, the answers to life's questions are also provided. Should I, for example, forgive my neighbor? Of course, just as I have been forgiven - though I in no way earned or deserved it. God grant to each of us that we understand and cling stubbornly to the simplicity and reality of the Christian faith. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 50:15-21** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

^{ESV} **Romans 14:5-9** One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

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The 15th Sunday after Pentecost – September 13, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 9 (Red Hymnal)

"O Day of Rest and Gladness"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 50:15-21) Lack of forgiveness will inevitably destroy any and every society. Some would argue that it is crucial for human existence. Forgiving someone who has sinned against you is seldom easy, but it is always God pleasing. We read first an excellent example in the account of Joseph, who was able to forgive the unimaginable evil done to him by his own brothers. He did so by looking to the bigger picture of how or why God might have allowed such terrible things to be done to him. We can learn from this.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30) (Read responsively)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 14:5-9) Jesus Christ is the basis for all that we do. He is also therefore the basis for all human forgiveness. That means that he is not only our perfect example, he is the One who earned our own forgiveness for us. Our second reading calls for tolerance in those things that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. While human beings naturally assume our own personal opinions to be superior to all others, the Holy Spirit here counsels us to take a step back and to examine all things in light of the bigger picture of Christ crucified.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 15 (Red Hymnal)

"From All that Dwell below the Skies"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 18:21-35 (Printed on the back page)

"Sin's Delusion"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 163 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 50 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (21) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Tuesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich have called recent seminary graduate Nicholas Naumann. Living Savior of Eden Prairie has called Pastor Todd Ohlmann. Pastor Thomas Schuetze is considering the call to Bethel of Morris.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet on Tuesday evening at 7pm.

Sunday School Teacher Installation – The Sunday School teachers for the 2020-2021 school year are scheduled to be installed during the service next Sunday.

Projects List – See the list on the mailbox table of projects in and around the church that need to be completed this fall.

Regular Schedule Resumes – Beginning this Sunday we resume our regular (non-Summer) schedule. Please see the list of activities above for times.

In Our Prayers – Please remember Jackie Meyer, mother of Dan Meyer, in your prayers as she struggles with severe health issues.