

# "Sin's Delusions"

Text: Matthew 18:21-35

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 sing 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."*

Focus 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 God's Word.

That part of God's Word that will serve as the basis for our study this morning is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 18<sup>th</sup> 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."**

This is God's Word, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore perfect in every respect. We are right to have great confidence in these words and in their ability to guide, comfort, strengthen, and inspire us – to deliver us from any alternate reality. That our God would grant such blessings to each of us also on this day, and always, 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 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 see themselves as victims. Their basis for this worldview is often as simple as having someone tell them that they 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, even if I have never been abused, mistreated, or robbed I am still a victim. How? Why? 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 becomes your worldview, it absolutely shapes and filters everything you experience in life from that point forward.

Here's an example of how that works. 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, never 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.

Delusional thought and alternate realities can quickly devolve into silliness, as when someone who pays a few dollars in taxes believes he therefore actually does “own the road,” but they can also be deadly serious – especially when we are talking about *sin's delusions*.

From that perspective, look again at 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 was revealed in verse 26 with these words: **“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, you need only to learn that **“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 delusional in the extreme, yet I have no doubt that the alternate reality in which the servant lived might well have convinced him that he could.

Obviously Jesus is not talking about a financial debt here but sin debt. Man's natural alternate reality (our natural “sin-delusion”) is that we can repay or make up in some way for all the times we have sinned. 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 without incurring more debt 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 piling up sin, and therefore also the debt for that sin. 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*. This delusional optimism is universal, right up until the Holy Spirit teaches us otherwise. I think it's safe to say that most human beings imagine that even in the absence of any change, tomorrow will not only be different but better. It's like the man who buys a pig for \$50 and sells it for \$45, reckoning that the solution is that he just needs to buy more pigs. Clearly that will only make his financial hemorrhaging worse.

Consider for a moment just how powerful this sin delusion must be to so thoroughly blind human beings 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 both to the enormity of our debt and the complete inability to pay any of that debt off. 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.

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 forgiveness. Patience and forgiveness are two very different things. *Patience* carries the implication that man can eventually provide, while *forgiveness* speaks to the fact that man can *never* provide. That simple fact is at the very core 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 God the 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 in connection with our sin debt. Patience gains us nothing but more time to add to that 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 God's 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. Our debt is forgiven. The King has declared it.

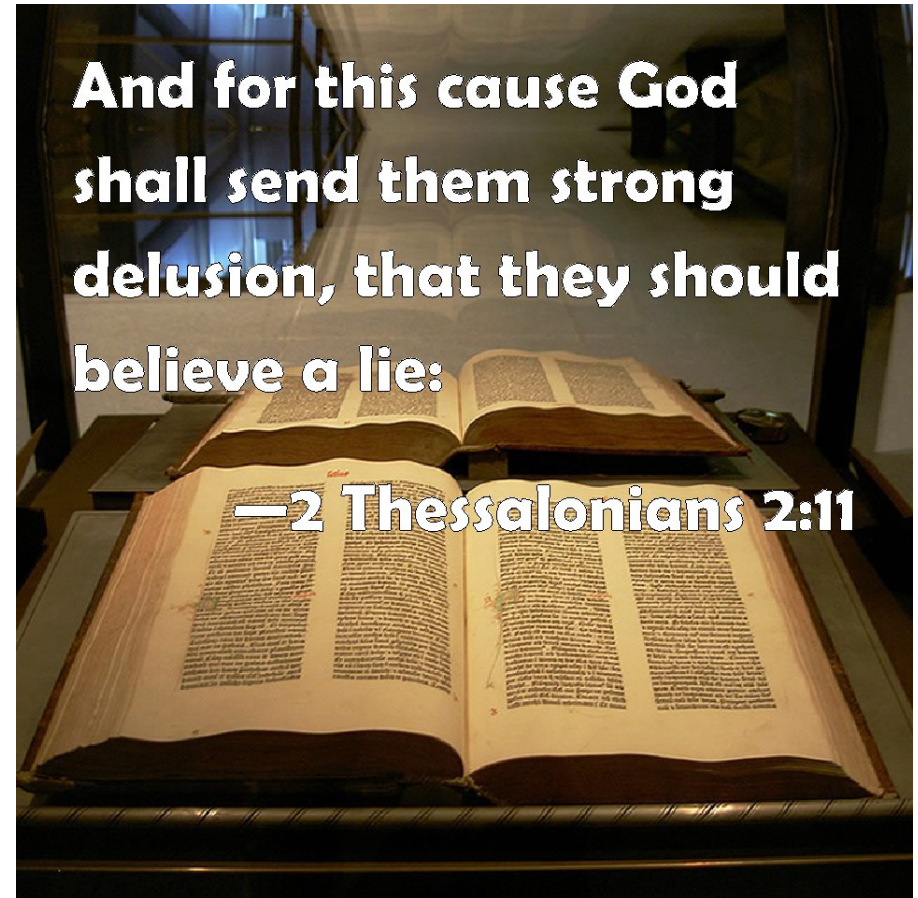
And yet what about the rest of our text? Having taught us about his undeserved mercy, does our Savior then throw the whole thing into doubt by demanding something from us – *"I'll pay this if you pay that; I'll forgive you if you forgive your neighbor"*? Is our sin debt then *almost* but not *fully* 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 forgiveness of his own debt, the wicked servant's subsequent actions proved that nothing had changed in his heart. It was therefore because of his rejection and unbelief that 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, to recognize the possibility of living in our own false reality, and to be reminded that only God's Word can be trusted to set us straight. Only God's Word can be trusted to clear away the fog of our natural misconceptions. And the greatest message of God's Word is his pronouncement of mercy, he himself having paid what we could not. When that divine reality, that message of sins forgiven, fills your heart and mind, any question about my forgiving others is easily answered. Should I forgive my neighbor? Of course, just as I have been forgiven though I in no way earned or deserved it. God grant us forgiving hearts, softened by the reality of our own forgiveness – which is certainly no delusion. Amen.

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." <sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, <sup>17</sup> '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. <sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

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?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. <sup>23</sup> ¶ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> 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.' <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."



## ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 17, 2023

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 226 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh, Come Thou Quickening Spirit"

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

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

**The First 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 not always 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.

## Psalm 8 (Supplement page 27) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Second 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 are 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 Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 512 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"O Christ, Our True and Only Light"

## The Sermon – Text: Matthew 18:21-35 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

**"Sin's Delusions"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 512 (Stanzas 3, 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"O Christ, Our True and Only Light"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 226 (Stanzas 7-9) (Red Hymnal)

"Come, Oh, Come Thou Quickening Spirit"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

## Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (43) Wednesday (35)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Mon-Wed</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire
	<b>– No Midweek Classes at St Paul</b>	
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor David Pfeiffer has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Frank Gantt is considering the call to Calvary of Marquette. The various boards of the CLC are scheduled to meet this week in Eau Claire.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

**WCPC** – A warm thank you to all who gave of their time and treasure, and opened their homes, in support of last week's West Central Pastoral Conference. This is a valuable service you have provided.

**Out of Town** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend CLC Board meetings in Eau Claire this week, leaving this evening and returning late Wednesday. As a result, there are no midweek classes scheduled for this week at St Paul.

**Mission Festival** – Our fall Mission Festival is scheduled for Sunday, October 1<sup>st</sup>. Our guest speaker will be Pastor Paul Nolting, who recently accepted a call to serve as parttime missionary to Tanzania. A fellowship meal will follow the service. Please plan to attend all of the day's activities.