

The Gospel According to Luke

Luke 17:7-10

Reading: Luke 17:7-10

Sermon #71
March 8, 2020

Paradox: Slave and Son

Last week, we learned about life in the community of God, his church. We learned that as his disciples, we are not to be the cause of someone else's sin. When someone sins against us, we are to act biblically; we are to rebuke them in love and, if they repent, reconcile and forgive. If they do not repent, we follow Matthew 18 until there is repentance or we break fellowship, but we still forgive.

The disciples knew that if they were going to be consistently faithful in this command from our Lord then they were going to need some supernatural aid. They asked that Jesus would increase their faith to make them worthy of such a difficult task. Jesus told them that they did not necessarily need more faith, but diligently use the faith they already possessed. A working faith produces diligent service unto the glory of God. True faithfulness will place the disciple in a relationship with God and as the relationship with God deepens the disciple begins to accomplish what they were created to do, namely, bringing glory to God out of love through service to God, His kingdom and to others. This made me sit back and think of myself, for I have often asked God to increase my faith. I feel my faith is often weak but Jesus is telling us to put our faith into action, to use our faith and trust in him and amazing things will come forth.

A disciple's life is to be lived in community with others and together they live for the glory of God under the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In community there is safety and greater faith. Jesus teaches that as disciples of his, we are to live out our lives in such a way that we are careful not to lead others into

sin, but when sin occurs, as it will, rebuke it and be quick to forgive when there is repentance. Do not worry about having great faith; just let the faith you have do its surprising work. Finally, disciples serve God as a matter of faith. For God is forever and completely faithful, so if you trust God, you are able serve him.

What should a disciple expect as he or she serves the Lord faithfully? What should our attitude be as we render consistent service to Christ? Jesus shows us in this parable what our perspective should be when we serve God and others in the community of faith, the Church. Jesus teaches us the proper attitude of a servant of God as He tells us about a landowner who has a small farm and one faithful slave.

This is God's Word for Canyon Bible this morning; please stand as Ivan reads God's Word from Luke chapter 17. (Luke 17:7-10)

Let me pray for us as we being journeying into God's Word this morning.

Let me begin with a question, "What does God owe you and what do you owe God?" How we answer this question will show the condition of our heart and relationship with Jesus.

The Slave Serves (Luke 17:7-8)

A slave serves his master. A slave performs his daily duties without question and without getting anything extra from the master. The master does not owe the slave anything extra because he did what was his duty. For us the concept of master and slave relationship seems very foreign. Because of this, if we are not careful here, we might just miss this rich parable Jesus tells us.

Jesus begins, “Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ⁸ Will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink’?” The first thing we should understand is the word in our Bibles translated as “servant” in the original language is *doulon* from the Greek word *doulos* meaning slave. Now, some translations say bondservant and this word was invented when the King James translation was being worked on in the early 17th century and finished in 1611 because the concept of slavery was becoming repugnant to society. This is not a hired worker or servant but a slave. A slave has no rights for they are the property of the master. The slave’s value is found only in the work he performs for the one who owns him. A slave works for his owner and has no rights to anything. Whether this master-slave relationship is right or wrong is not the issue. Jesus uses this picture to explain a much deeper spiritual truth to His followers.

In ancient society and even in some places today being a slave is to be a part of the very bottom of the social ladder in society. To be a slave in the physical realm of earth is to be low in the social order. With this in mind, Jesus’ story is basically a story of a single slave working for a master on a small farm. The slave works very hard every day. He bakes the heat of the day out in the fields and then washes and prepares and serves dinner for the master.

A Slave Is Owed Nothing (Luke 17:7-9)

Jesus tells the story and in verses 7 and 9 he gives us an absurd picture, “Will any one of you who has a ~~servant~~ *slave* ... when he has come in from the field, say, ‘Come at once and recline at table’? ... Does he thank the ~~servant~~ *slave*

because he did what was commanded?" Jesus gives the image of the master asking the slave to be seated and the master serves his slave because he worked hard all day out in the field. How would we illustrate this today? Let me see - image going out to dinner and as the waitperson finishes taking your order he looks at you and says, "While I put in your order, I will put one in for myself, because I have been working hard and I am hungry and since there are only 2 of you at this table that seats 4 I will sit down and enjoy a great meal with you and we will get to know each other. He comes and sits down with you and when the dinner orders are ready, he asks you to go to the kitchen and bring the orders to the table. This would be a great date night! Even if he is a great waiter, he is not part of the family, he is the hired help and his job is to serve you. If he serves well you will most likely leave him a good tip to pay for his services.

The point Jesus is making is that the master does not owe the slave any favors or special treatment because the slave does what he is told to do. A slave who serves well does not have the right to be treated as if he is part of the family - he is still a slave, he is property. The role of the slave is to serve the Master, as verse 8 states, **"Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink."** The Master does not owe the slave anything for simply serving like he is supposed to.

Many people think that because they serve God, they are racking up brownie points for heaven or some sort of employee of the month status that will earn them special treatment with God. Many wrongly think if they do their duty in serving God then it is His duty to reward them. These ways of thinking are wrong. God never owes us anything; He does not owe us forgiveness, salvation, heaven, or anything else. He is the Master and we are the slaves. A slave works and does his

job because the master has commanded him to do so and this in no way entitles him to anything that belongs to the master. As verse 9 questions this absurdity, “Does he thank the ~~servant~~ *slave* because he did what was commanded?”

It is important to look at another Greek word to gather the full meaning of the text. Jesus asks the question, “Does he **thank the ~~servant~~ *slave* because he did what was commanded?**” The word “**thank**” comes from the word *charis*, which is where we get the word *grace*. So, with this in mind, what is Jesus communicating here? Does the master owe the servant grace because of his service? The answer is no. The slave is still a slave no matter the extent of the service and the master is not in any way obligated to extend grace or favor to the slave. A slave cannot become a son based on hard work; the slave is property, not family.

The Slave is Unworthy (Luke 17:10)

The stark reality that we must get into our self-righteous heads is that on our very best day, we are still unworthy slaves and God owes us nothing. Verse 10 is clear, “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy ~~servants~~ *slaves*; we have only done what was our duty.’ ” In the Greek *akh-ri-os* translated as “unworthy” and means not yielding gain - our efforts do not gain or add anything to God for he is perfect and we cannot take credit for what is accomplished in his name. At best we have done only “what was our duty”. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting.” *I agree, it is a privilege to preach the gospel and I am doing as commanded. As Paul continues, “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!* ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship. ¹⁸ What then is

my reward? That in my preaching I may present the gospel free of charge ...” (1 Corinthians 9:16-18) Here is one of the many apparent contradictions, as the world views it, of the Christian faith. A slave of God does as he is commanded not out of duty, although it is his duty, but out of love of his Master and the joy of serving Him. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and our Savior we live for his glory and he is our Master

The truth is, God does not owe you or me anything. If this sounds harsh then it is because of our self-righteous pride we think we have really done something for God. In fact, we may secretly hope that the good things we do will gain us some kind of leverage with the God. But even if we did everything God ever wanted us to do - even then we would have only done our duty. We should not think, therefore, that we have merited any favor or grace with God.

The religious leaders of Israel felt that God owed them because of their service to Him. Further they felt the people owed them because of their position and because they represented God to the people. Both of these attitudes were wrong. Jesus wanted to make sure his disciples were not serving God with the attitude that doing something in service to God would somehow merit them God’s favor. God loves those who have come to him through Jesus, his Son with a agape love that is not dependent upon our service. A relationship with God has always been a condition of the heart – heart of stone or heart of flesh.

We are unworthy because on our best day we have only done what was our duty. Unworthy is to do what is expected and in truth less than our best. The truth is, for all of us, we are worse than unworthy. We are worse than unworthy because

on our best day we simply do what God expects – but, I ask, what about all the other days we fall short of our best?

So, the issue very quickly surfaces, if we cannot even rise to the position of being an unworthy slave, then how will we ever be accepted by God? How will He ever show us the grace we need so desperately? If it cannot be earned and we are not worthy to receive it, how is it possible to get God’s grace, his mercy and gift of salvation?

To answer this question, I want us to go back to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Reading from verse 17 of chapter 15, “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

Notice that the son in this parable is not a slave. The lost son says, “How many of my father’s hired servants.” (Greek *misthious* meaning hired worker)... The son continues, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”¹⁹ I am no

longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” The son’s solution, after he came to himself, was to return to his father as a hired worker for he had spent his inheritance. The problem was, he was not a hired worker but a son. He reasoned that because of his sin and because he wasted all his father’s money that he was no longer worthy to be a son. Regardless of what he did, his identity would always be his father’s son.

This is true, even though the son is not worthy to be called a son, he is still his father’s son. Even though, the son has not been acting like a son, he nevertheless is a son. The father still acts like the father and receives his lost son back. The father’s love is not based on the son’s performance.

The issue for us is, if a slave is a slave, a hired worker is not a son and a son is a son, then how do we get from being a slave to being a son? Jesus tells us in this parable that we do not earn grace by being hard working slaves. How is it that a slave could be welcomed into the dining room of the great banquet feast and sit down at the table not as a slave who has no claim to the family of God, but as a son who rightfully has a place in the family of God?

A Slave is Made a Son Through Christ

In a perfect world and on our absolute best day we are unprofitable and unworthy slaves. Why? Because of Adam, we are born slaves to sin. The sad truth is also that 99.9% of our slave experience has not even lived up to the status of unworthy, because of our fallen nature we are lower than unworthy slaves. We are to serve God because he loved us and reached down to us and this enabled us to love him as our God and our Creator, and we are transformed to love serving God. However, serving God will not make us sons and daughters even on our best day.

Our text today shows us clearly that our status as slaves is fixed. A human cannot change his status, just as a man cannot change the color of his skin or a leopard its spots. Because no amount of hard work will gain us one ounce of grace then we are dependent on God for making the switch in our lives from slave to son.

In our parable today, Jesus shows us the normal master-to-slave relationship. However, God chooses to not act like the master in this parable He chooses to make the change – it is God who takes the initiative and it is only God that is able to make this transformation. As absurd as it sounds for a master to serve the slave, that is exactly what Jesus did for us. Jesus came to this wicked world not to be served, which was His right as the Son of God, but to serve. Jesus states this clearly, as recorded in the gospel According to Mark, “*And Jesus called them the disciples to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.* ⁴³ *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,* ⁴⁴ *and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.* ⁴⁵ *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’*” (Mark 10:42-45) Here Jesus shows the reverse of the parable in Luke where the servant is a slave, when we become a son of God we are to be as obedient as a slave, but we forever remain a son. As the children of God, we are to model Jesus who gave his life as a ransom for many. As the joyful slave of God, who he has adopted, out of our love for God our Father we become willing servants who are also sons. How can this be true? It was the life and death of Jesus Christ that made this absurdity a wonderful reality for us. He served God the Father and by his service we were invited into the house of God as sons and joyful slaves of Christ. Do you see the wonderful, amazing grace that God extends to

sinner? Do you see the generosity of Christ? He extends grace that is unearned and completely undeserved. He gives it without the least bit of merit on our part. He gives it because it is - His to give. He gives it because the Father has given Him an inheritance among the nations - a people set apart for glory and grace. Since many have been made sons and daughters through the grace of God given in Christ, God's house will be full of believers - believers from past, present and future will fill the house of God in eternal celebration.

Jesus Christ came and gave His life to pay the ransom for many. By Jesus' sacrifice many are made sons and daughters. Many are saved by the death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ. But, unfortunately not all. Here we approach a wonderful and difficult truth. All whom God gives the Son, Jesus Christ, become sons and daughters. It is the Jesus atoning sacrifice on the cross that saves and creates sons from slaves, but not everyone becomes a son of God and many remain slaves to sin forever.

It is so important that we understand that the cross does not make salvation possible. If the cross only made salvation possible then no one would be saved because it places salvation in the hands of slaves who cannot make themselves to be sons. A slave is a slave until God makes him a son. Through the wonderful grace of God, slaves are made sons. The cross saves sinners only because Jesus paid the price for our salvation, but the cross does not make it possible for us to save ourselves. The many in Mark chapter 10 is every slave made a son by the grace of God. The exact number God chooses to save. The exact number, no more and no less. All whom God gives His Son, Jesus, will come to the Son seeking God and by God's grace he makes them family.

So, we serve as beloved children of God, in his house, like in any household, family has certain responsibilities, not as slaves, but as family. We have entered into the house of God by grace through faith and not of works. This is a paradox the world simply cannot understand.

My beloved, serve diligently as sons and daughters, not earning favor but because through Christ we are favored, through Christ we receive love beyond measure, through Christ we have become sons and daughters of the King of kings! Amen and amen!