

Hard Sayings Of Jesus

Lesson 18

I. This Week's Hard Saying

Luke 17:7-10 "Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? 8 Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? 9 Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? 10 So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" NIV

II. Why This Is Hard

- This would not be considered hard for a person living in first century Palestine because he would understand the **relationship** between the slave and master.
- But, for 21st Century Christians in the U.S. the master in this story seems harsh and acts "**unfairly**" toward his hardworking slave.
- To say that one who does everything expected of him has merely done his **duty**, hardly seems gracious enough to our way of thinking.

III. A Wrong View of God

- The relationship between the farmer and the slave is not how we normally think of our relationship with God. We are, after all, children of God, and the picture of God as a **taskmaster** is not at all attractive to contemporary American Christians.
- We prefer to think of God as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, or like the master who makes his servants sit down to a meal and waits on them at table. We prefer to think of God as caring, compassionate and all **loving**.
- We should, however, be careful. Throughout the Bible, and no less in the sayings we have of Jesus, it is clear that God is very **demanding** indeed. Matt 25:26 *His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: KJV*
- He has given us life and its many blessings. He guides and supports us. We therefore have to recognize that we are completely dependent on him for everything. Because this is the case, we can never really say, "I have done **enough**".
- In this brief parable Jesus is teaching a concept that is foreign to our way of thinking: that of humble, dutiful, **servant-hood**.

IV. A Wrong View of Servant-hood

- The English translation of Greek *doulos* is "servant," but the word used in this passage describes a **slave**, probably the only slave of a small farmer, a slave who not only works in the field, but also performs household chores.
- But to Jews in the **First Century** Roman Empire, slavery was just a fact of life. The average person didn't own slaves, but many villages would have one or more wealthy persons who owned slaves.
- The slave in this brief parable, probably the only slave in this household, did a combination of things, plowing, looking after livestock, as well as cooking and household chores. The slave is due **no thanks** for doing what he is told. V9 *Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?*
- The Greek word **charis** used in this text implies more than an expression of "thanks". Here the phrase, literally "have gratitude" is used in the sense of "to be grateful."
- This use carries with it the idea of a **debt** of gratitude that must be offered to even the score which would place the master in debt to the slave. Obviously, by virtue of the relationship, the slave is the one continuously indebted to the master.
- When we lose sight of the nature of the relationship we have with our Master it is easy for us to get this backwards and pray "**gimme**" prayers, not servant prayers. This may be overcome by having a proper sense of God.
 - Please help my business succeed.
 - Help my children to be safe at school.
 - Heal my mother's cancer.
 - Protect the widows and orphans.
 - Provide food to those experiencing a famine.
 - and -- while you're at it, God, --
 - Work in my boss's heart to give me a raise.

IV. A Proper Sense of God

- The nature of God is **illimitable**, and all the attributes of that nature are infinitely glorious.
- His attributes cannot be lessened by the sins of his creatures, nor can they be **increased** by the uninterrupted, eternal obedience, and unceasing praise of every creature and all creation.
- Further, we derive our being from His infinite fountain of life: we are **upheld** by the continued energy of the Almighty, and our obedience and service add nothing, and can add nothing, to the absolute excellencies and glories of our God. Acts 17:28 *For in him we live, and move, and have our being KJV Col 1:17 and by him all things consist. KJV*

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- d. Therefore, we have conferred no favor. We have "merited" nothing. We have not "benefited" God, or laid him under "obligation." If he rewards us, it will be matter of unmerited favor. This is the true relation of believers to Christ.

V. A Proper Sense of Self as Servant

- a. Our services are not "profitable" to God; He "needs" not our aid, and His essential happiness will not be increased by our efforts. Job 22:2 *Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? KJV*
- b. The grace to do his will comes from him only, and all the praise of that supply will be due directly to him. Eph 2:10 *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. KJV Rev 4:10-11 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. KJV*
- c. We are unprofitable servants. We have done only what it is our duty to do. The profit does not begin until the servant goes beyond his obligation. Since we owe all things, even our lives to our Master we can never be profitable to Him. Rom 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. KJV*
- d. Our best services are mingled with imperfections. We come short of his glory; we do not serve him as sincerely, and cheerfully, and faithfully as we ought; we are far, very far from the example set us by the Savior. Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; KJV*
- e. If we are saved and rewarded, it will be because God will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and will remember our iniquities no more. Heb 8:12 *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. KJV*
- f. As God's servants, it is fitting for us to fill up our time with duty to Him, rather than being preoccupied with our own delights and entertainment. 1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. KJV*
- g. It is fit that Christ should be served before us. When we wait upon him, we must gird ourselves, must free ourselves from every thing that is entangling and encumbering. Heb 12:1 *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, KJV*
- h. We expect God's favor, not because we have by our services made him a debtor to us, but because he has by his promises made himself a debtor to his own honor. Ezek 20:44 *And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, KJV*
- i. According to this passage the Greek adjective means "pertaining to being unworthy of any praise, 'unworthy.' So, we must mortify our attitudes of "entitlement" and instead see ourselves as "unworthy slaves."
- j. The blessings of God are ours because of our adoption as "sons," but that adoption itself is by grace. God doesn't owe us anything -- he gives it freely. Rather, it is we who owe him an unpayable debt.

VIII. Application: Take a moment to consider your servant-hood to God.

This profound confession of faith is attributed to a young African pastor who was martyred for his faith after leaving these words in his journal. To what extent does your assessment of your own servant-hood match that of this, your fellow laborer?

I am part of the "Fellowship of the Unashamed." I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals.

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