

The Master and His Servant

Luke 17:7-10

Today, we are concluding our sermon series entitled, "Glimpses of God." We've been looking at a number of parables and the glimpses they give us into God. Today we are going to be looking at a parable in Luke 17.

At the start of Luke 17, we are told that Jesus is speaking to his disciples (v. 1). Luke then records Jesus' teachings about not being a stumbling block; about rebuking a sinning brother; and, about forgiving a sinning brother. In response to this teaching, the disciples say to Jesus, "Increase our faith" (v. 5). It's in this context that Luke presents Jesus' parable. Luke first presents Jesus' parable about the things you can do if you have the faith of a mustard seed and then in verse 7, we find the parable that we are looking at today.

In the parable that Jesus presents here there are two characters - a master and the master's slave. Jesus is using an illustration from contemporary culture to make a point. Before we look at what Jesus says I want to make a comment about Jesus' use of slavery as an example. For us, slavery is such a moral evil that it can be troubling that Jesus uses slavery as an example without any sense of condemnation. Is he condoning slavery? The answer is no; Jesus does not condone slavery and the New Testament does not condone slavery. But, Jesus lived at a time in history when slavery was a huge part of the social structure of the day and so He uses that practice as a teaching point.

Here's an example that I believe is similar to what Jesus is doing here. When I was in college, I remember a mentor giving me an article that was written by a young communist to his girlfriend to break up with her based on his total commitment to communism. In the letter writes his willing to give all for the cause of communism - his time, his money and even his life. It was a letter that expressed unbelievable commitment to a cause. That letter was used to challenge Christians to be committed to the cause of Christ in the same way. But here's the deal, I never thought my mentor was condoning communism. Not at all. Rather, he was using an example from culture that I would get. And that's what Jesus is doing here as he uses slavery as an example as an example from culture that his disciples would get.

And so with that, let's look at the parable starting in verse 7. Jesus says:

⁷ "But which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'?"

Jesus knows that the unanimous answer will be that no master has his slave eat first. The disciples knew from the culture around them that this was not the way things worked.

Jesus continues:

⁸ *"But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk; and afterward you will eat and drink'?"*

The servant doesn't eat first. Instead he comes in from the field, from either plowing or tending sheep, and is told to prepare something for the master to eat. The servant needs to get cleaned up and put on some proper clothes so that he can serve the master until the master has eaten and drunk. Once the master is taken care of then the servant may eat and drink. But the master comes first. And again, the disciples would be thinking, "Yes, that's the way it works."

Jesus adds one more comment:

⁹ *"He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?"*

Does the master thank the servant for coming in from a day of work in the field and then serving him food and drink? No. He does not. Because this is simply what a servant does. He has only done what is his responsibility. His role, his place, is to serve the master. No one in that culture would look at what the servant did to serve his master and think that what the servant has done is exceptional. It was normal. It was what was expected.

Again, Jesus is simply drawing the disciple's attention to an example from culture. And the disciples are thinking, "Yep, that's the way it works." And though the New Testament doesn't indicate that the disciples personally had servants, I'm guessing they looked at Jesus' story through the lens of the master. But then Jesus sort of turns the parable on them and says:

¹⁰ *"So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"*

Jesus' point is that God is the master and we are the slaves. That's where the lesson is for the disciples (and us) in this parable.

Remember the context? Jesus is responding to the disciple's statement, "Increase our faith" (v. 5). It is like the disciples were looking at the things Jesus, their master, was commanding them to do and thinking that what He was commanding them to do was really exceptional; that it was above and beyond and so they needed extra faith. And in response Jesus first says that you only need the faith of a mustard seed - that's verse 6. And in our parable, he is saying, that when you do what I've commanded, you are not actually doing something exceptional, you are simply doing that which you ought to

have done. You have done what is your duty as a servant of the master and your attitude should be "*We are unworthy slaves.*"

And so, what is the glimpse of God we get in the parable? It is this: **God is absolutely sovereign and deserves of our complete obedience.** In the rest of our time, I want to think about the two parts of this truth for a few moments.

First, God is absolutely sovereign. Honestly, we have a hard time getting our minds around what it looks like to have a sovereign ruler over us. Think about it - we live in a democratic, individualistic culture in which we celebrate our independence and freedom. In our culture so many people think that they have "arrived" when they reach the place in their lives when no one tells them what to do. Have you ever heard someone say, "I can't wait until I'm old enough or financially independent and can do whatever I want"?

We think this way. And it spills into how we think about God. But God is not an elected official to whom we have granted power. He is not a heavenly advisor that gives us advice to follow or not follow based on our own choosing. No, He is sovereign. He is a king. God literally is our master.

There are a couple of corollaries that go with this truth. One is that **we exist for God; not Him for us.** Sometimes we really think God exists for us. We think that God's purpose is to meet our needs; to make our lives comfortable or to give us what we need. But the point that Jesus is making in this parable is that the servant exists for the master. God is the master. We are the servant. We exist for God. We exist to do God's bidding. We exist for His glory.

This is really important, because if we think God exists for us - to make our lives comfortable and easy or whatever, when it doesn't shake out like that then we can become angry at God. We can think that God has failed us. "How dare God allow me to go through something so hard!" But if we understand that we exist for God and His purposes then when He does as He pleases and allows us to encounter tough times we are in a better position to trust Him, knowing that our master has a good reason that He has allowed our life to be hard. We exist for God; not Him for us.

The other corollary of this truth that God is sovereign is this: **God has the right to command His servants to do whatever He desires.** The master in the story had the right to expect the servant to serve him his food first before the servant ate. God has the right to command that we forgive our brother or sister in Christ who has sinned against us. He has the right to command that we give up all to follow Him. He has the right to command that we live generous lives. God has the right. He is absolutely sovereign.

How do you see God? Do you see Him as absolutely sovereign over your life? Do you see Him as the Lord and King who possesses the right to command you to do whatever He desires? Do you believe that you exist for Him; not the other way around? Or do

you tend to act like you live in a kind of democracy with God where you can make up your own mind about what you'd like to do?

God is absolutely sovereign and because of that **God deserves our complete obedience.** In the parable the slave put his master before himself even when most likely he didn't feel like it. He served the master. He obeyed the master. That is the nature of the master/slave relationship. And that's the nature of a disciple's relationship with God, because God is the master and we are the slave.

We are to obey God completely. Jesus says, *when you do all the things which are commanded you.* In the context, *all the things which are commanded* would include the instructions from the first part of chapter 17, but it would also include all of the instructions that we have been commanded as followers of Christ. And when we do all that we have been commanded our attitude is simply to be that we have done only what we ought to have done.

When we have done all that is commanded, we should not think, "I've done something exceptional and now God is obligated to bless me." Or, "God is going to answer my prayer in the way I want Him to because of all that I've done for him." We should not think like this, but rather, as Jesus says, we need to say, "*We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.*"

We are *unworthy* in the sense that our obedience has not merited anything before God. By our obedience we have no special claim upon God. We have simply done what we should have done. We have given God what He deserves - our complete obedience.

It is sort of like this. How would you think about a child who came to you at the end of the day and said, "Mom, Dad, today I took a shower, I brushed my teeth, I went to school and put my dirty clothes in the hamper. Now, pay me for what I've done.." You'd think your child had gone crazy right? You'd probably be happy they did all those things, but you would be thinking, "Child, you've only done what you should have done. You've done what is your responsibility to do. It's just what you do as part of the family. You don't get paid for that."

When we obey God; when we do all that is commanded; even the stuff that we think is incredibly sacrificial, we have simply done what we should have done. We have done what is our responsibility to do as God's servant. It is not exceptional. It's not something that earns God's favor. He doesn't owe us anything in return. God is absolutely sovereign and because of that He deserves our full obedience.

Two Points of Clarification: I want to make two points of clarification. As is true with almost all parables, we need to be careful to not push this parable to say more than what Jesus is actually teaching.

And so the first clarification is this: **This parable is not denying that God rewards His people.** He does. It is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. Think about what Jesus said to Peter in Mark 10:28-30:

²⁸ Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, ³⁰ but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

God does reward us. And so that is not the point of this parable. The point of the parable is simply that when we do what is commanded, we have only done what we ought to do as followers of Christ. And if God wants to reward, then it is a gift of His grace.

Here's the second point of clarification. The master in the parable looks harsh and cold, right? Is Jesus saying that this is what God is like? Of course not. Scripture teaches that **God is not harsh or mean; He loves us like children.** 1 John 3:1 says:

See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.

So, while God is sovereign and He deserves our full obedience, He is a Father that loves us. We are His children. This parable about obedience doesn't deny any of that. This image of God as a good and loving Heavenly Father is central to how we think about our relationship to Him. He is not harsh. He is not mean. He loves us. He wants what is best for us like a good Father would.

This parable is simply teaching that God is absolutely sovereign and He deserve our full obedience. That's the glimpse we get of God in this parable. And this truth begs the question that I'm going to ask you: Have you submitted to God sovereign rule in your life? Have you said to God and meant it, "I will obey you . . . period"?

This does not mean that we won't ever struggle with sin or disobey sometimes, because we will. None of us will ever perfectly obey God in this life. The question I'm asking is have you fundamentally settled the issue of who is in charge of your life? Have you rightfully acknowledged that God is sovereign over your life and that He deserves your full obedience? Have you decided that God is your master? And if you haven't, will you?

I remember when I was first challenged with this idea. I thought that if I would fully commit to follow Him that He would make my life miserable; that I'd end up doing things I hated and would be deprived of so much. But I became convinced that that was a warped view of God. I guess I did think He was harsh or mean or something. But ultimately I became convinced that He really did love me and that to follow Him unreser-

vedly really would be best. I'm not at all saying that I always obey Him perfectly. I don't. I still mess up. My self-will at times rises up. But fundamentally I've settled this issue of who is in charge. And what I've experienced is joy and adventure and significance and life. I've discovered that to submit to God's sovereignty and to obey Him fully really is the best kind of life.

Communion: Today, we are going to be celebrating communion. As we do, I want to encourage you to allow God to examine your heart. Is there any way in which you are saying to God and His desires for you, "I won't"? If so, confess that to Him. And invite Him to give you an honest desire to obey Him as your sovereign Lord.

At the heart of what should move us to full obedience is God's love for us. He loves you. He does know and He does want what is best for you. The celebration of communion is a reminder of God's infinite love for us. Because of love, God was moved to send His son into the world to be the sacrifice for our sin. Is God harsh or mean? What He did at the cross in Christ shouts to us, no! He loves you. He loves you. As you take first the bread symbolic of Jesus' broken body and then the juice, symbolic of his shed blood, be reminded of God's love.