Message 22: Slaves, Masters and Living for Jesus

5.7.23

**5**Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ. **6**Don’t work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, do God’s will from your heart. **7**Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people, **8**knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord. **9**And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

# Introduction: The Kingdom is lived out in relationships.

A. Today, we look at the third group of people the Apostle addresses.

1. First, it was husbands and wives.

2. Then Children and parents.

3. And now slaves and masters.

4. Our relationship with those we live and work with are where the Kingdom of God is most clearly visible.

B. The Apostle gives commands and instructions to three groups of people that he doesn’t participate in.

1. He wasn’t a husband, a parent, or a slave.

2. The Book of Acts tells us that Paul was born a citizen of Rome, a free person.

a. This placed Paul among the elite in the Roman Empire.

b. By our standards, Paul is the least qualified person to advise married couples, parents, or slaves and masters.

c. Yet, God used Paul as the medium for these divine truths.

3. What if the Apostle Paul was more qualified than we realize?

a. What if Paul understood each of these arenas in a way that was unique and profound?

b. Paul understood these realities in a deep way.

C. The Apostle Paul saw himself in these three situations:

1. He was part of the Church, therefore, a member of the Bride of Christ and his job was to submit to the headship of Jesus.

2. Paul understood that he was a co-heir with Christ Jesus, and although we are not divine, we are called sons of God. Thus, Paul’s life was a constant endeavor to honor and obey his heavenly Father.

3. Thirdly, Paul, the Roman Citizen, consistently identifies as servant, the slave of Christ.

a. With all the lofty language Paul employs in his letters, he never forgot that He served at the privilege of the Master.

b. I believe this is a helpful balance for us.

1. We are both co-heirs with Christ and servants of Jesus.

2. In eternity, we will receive crowns of glory and cast those crowns at Jesus’ feet.

D. Paul’s instructions for spouses, children, and slaves provide a framework that shapes our relationship with Jesus.

1. Submission and love, honor and obedience, diligence and sincerity are a few of the attitudes these relationships teach us.

2. Relationships with others are key elements of our discipleship.

# 1. Slavery and the Roman Empire.

A. It’s important for us to have an informed perspective on ancient slavery.

1. Slaves came from varied places and backgrounds.

a. Conquered peoples were perhaps the main source.

b. Some were born into slavery.

c. Others sold themselves into slavery due to debts.

2. Any number of races or people groups could become slaves.

a. Unlike 19th century America where slavery was predominantly forced upon one racial group, slaves could come from any nationality, race, or people group.

b. Therefore, it could be hard to tell a freed person or citizen from a slave, as in the example of the Apostle Paul in Acts 22:25-29 who surprised the Roman soldiers with his citizenship.

3. Not all slavery situations were the same.

a. The worst situation was mining, where the life expectancy of slaves could be measured in days.

b. Many were involved in farming or construction.

c. Some slaves worked in wealthy households, having a better standard of living and potentially owning slaves themselves.

d. Regardless, slavery meant someone else owned your life, and you were property.

B. The Roman Empire was dependent upon slavery:

1. According to historians at the British Museum,

Scholars estimate about 10% (but possibly up to 20%) of the Roman Empire population of 50 million (in the first century AD) between five and ten million were enslaved. This number would have been unequally distributed across the empire, with a higher concentration of enslaved people in urban areas and in Italy. (British Museum)[[1]](#footnote-1)

2. Within the Ephesian church, there certainly were members who were slaves and others who owned slaves.

3. Slavery was a real-life issue for the Church in Roman cities.

a. This does not mean slavery was ideal or even God’s plan.

b. Just like modern-day slavery, where an estimated 49.6 million people are in slavery,[[2]](#footnote-2) Paul’s letter is not excusing slavery but providing guidance in a very sinful situation.

C. Most of what we of slavery in Roman history comes from texts written by slave owners.

1. These authors had little interest in describing servants' daily lives and they only present us with polarised depictions of enslaved individuals.

2. They are presented either as stereotypical 'good slaves' or, more commonly, as 'bad', 'disloyal', 'lazy' and deceitful people.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

a. This helps explain why Paul was adamant that those believers in Ephesus who were in slavery should be hard-working and diligent.

b. Even in their slavery, they represented Christ to their masters and household.

c. If they must be in slavery, they still had an obligation to represent Jesus.

d. Their newfound freedom in Jesus did not give them permission to be lazy, disloyal, or deceitful.

Why do we care? Although there are principles in Ephesians 6 that apply to employers and employees, we miss something of vital importance if we skip to application.

# 2. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.

A. Paul refers to himself in Romans 1, Philippians 1, and Titus 1 as “a servant of Christ Jesus.”

1. In each of these letters, Paul opens with this phrase.

2. I’m a firm believer that first impressions matter:

a. We often lead with our greatest achievement, attribute, or what matters most.

b. In these letters, Paul starts with what he felt was most important:

c. His position as a servant of Jesus.

B. The word Paul uses for servant is doulos: which means slave.

1. There are different degrees of slavery and servanthood, but it was the same word.

2. Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus.

3. Each time the Apostle refers to himself as a servant of Jesus, he relates his condition and position to slavery.

a. Jesus was his Master and Lord.

b. Where Jesus told him to go, he would go.

c. What Jesus told him to do, he would do.

d. What Jesus commanded him to say, Paul said.

e. Paul’s life was not his own but wrapped up in Christ.

C. It is crucial to remain mindful of our privilege and position and not let it lead us to become conceited and overconfident.

1. The Apostle Paul was confident in his position:

a. He knew who he was in Christ Jesus.

b. He knew he was seated with Christ.

2. The Apostle Paul enjoyed the privilege of walking worthy of God's calling.

a. He saw miracles.

b. He spoke with kings and leaders.

c. He caused riots and was used to write Scripture.

d. He had all the qualifications and titles to his name.

3. Yet, his favorite introduction was “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.”

4. Paul’s role model was Jesus.

a. The same Jesus that in Philippians 2, we read:

**Philippians 2:5–11 (NLT)**

5You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6Though he was God,

he did not think of equality with God

as something to cling to.

7Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

he took the humble position of a slave

and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,

8he humbled himself in obedience to God

and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

9Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor

and gave him the name above all other names,

10that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

D. The men and women in Ephesus understood lordship.

1. They had sworn oaths at the Temple of Artemis and the Temple to the Roman Emperor.

2. But now that they were followers of Jesus, they were now called to confess Jesus as their Lord and Master.

# 3. Slavery is part of our identity.

A. This seems wrong, but it’s very clear in Scripture.

1. One of the clearest passages is in the book of Romans.

2. Paul declares that we were once slaves to sin, but through Jesus we became “enslaved to righteousness.”

Romans 6:15–23 (CSB)

**FROM SLAVES OF SIN TO SLAVES OF GOD**

**15**What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? Absolutely not! **16**Don’t you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of that one you obey—either of sin leading to death or of obedience leading to righteousness? **17**But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, **18**and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness. **19**I am using a human analogy because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you offered the parts of yourselves as slaves to impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification. **20**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free with regard to righteousness., **21**So what fruit was produced then from the things you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. **22**But now, since you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, you have your fruit, which results in sanctification—and the outcome is eternal life! **23**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**B. Our salvation through Christ is precipitated by our declaration of Jesus as Lord.**

1. Jesus does not become your Savior by declaring Him to be your buddy.

2. Jesus is not your grandpappy.

3. Jesus must be your Lord and Master.

**Romans 10:9 (CSB)**

**9**If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

C. Paul understood that the Christian life is a life of submission.

1. Submit one to another.

2. Wives submit to your husbands.

3. Slaves submit to your masters.

4. But most importantly, SUBMIT TO JESUS!

D. For those born free, in Christ, they are slaves.

1. For those born in slavery, in Christ, there is freedom.

2. **1 Corinthians 7:22 (CSB)**

**22**For he who is called by the Lord as a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called as a free man is Christ’s slave.

3. The Kingdom of God is full of paradoxes like this.

a. The first shall be last and the last first.

b. In Christ, we are free to serve Christ.

E. Paul wrote to the Roman church in Romans to present their bodies as living sacrifices.

1. In Romans 12:1, some of the more modern translations end the passage by saying “This is your true worship (CSB) or spiritual worship.

2. But the KJV translates it in a way that captivates me.

a. Many of us mistakenly view worship as singing or church or giving money.

b. Worship is something that we feel like we can withhold when we don’t feel like or if it costs too much.

c. But The KJV makes a bold statement:

d. 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.

1. An employee can refuse to do something.

2. A worker can determine that something is outside of her contract or duties.

3. But a slave has no choice.

4. Everything the master asks of his servant is reasonable.

e. Regarding our relationship with Jesus, He is Lord and Master.

f. Therefore, whatever He asks of you is reasonable.

# 4. Living in light of this passage:

**5**Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as you would Christ. **6**Don’t work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, do God’s will from your heart. **7**Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people, **8**knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord. **9**And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

A. **Principle #1**. The why and how matter.

1. Slaves did not choose what they did.

a. There were no job fairs for slaves to attend.

b. Each slave performed the tasks before them.

c. You may not be able to choose what we do, but we can choose how we do it.

2. At work you may not have much of a choice in what you must do, but you can choose how you do it.

a. Work and serve in the sincerity of heart unto the Lord.

b. If you sweep floors, do it to for the Lord.

c. If you care for kids, love them with every fiber of your being.

3. What you are called to do is not nearly as important as the why and how.

B. **Principle #2. All of us get graded on attitude.**

**6**Don’t work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, do God’s will from your heart. **7**Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people,

1. Even though Paul speaks specifically to people in actual slavery, this still applies to each of us.

2. Our attitude not only matters, but it impacts the reward.

***8****knowing that whatever good each one does, slave or free, he will receive this back from the Lord.*

3. The thing about being a Living Sacrifice, Rom 12:1, is we have a choice to stay on the altar.

a. I’m afraid that too often, our attitudes have us popping on and off the altar of sacrifice.

b. God ties our blessing with our service:

C. **Principle #3. The only status that matters is our relationship with Jesus.**

**9**And masters, treat your slaves the same way, without threatening them, because you know that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

1. Jesus shows no favoritism.

a. No matter the label the world puts on you, those labels are swallowed up in Jesus.

b. Servant, master, husband, wife, child, parent, slave, free, Greek, Jew, Roman, doesn’t matter.

c. The Lord does not love one over the other.

d. There is no favoritism:

1. God so loved the world…

2. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

3. Every person who has ever breathed has been in need of a Savior.

2. We live in a world that is getting creative with labels.

a. But the only label that matters is the label, “redeemed”.

b. “A servant in Jesus’ household is better than a king in Satan’s kingdom.”

# Close: Where has Christ asked you to serve?

A. The Lord is calling all of us.

1. For some, the calling is to remain faithful where He has planted you.

2. Others, the Lord is preparing to move or transition you, but you have to trust Him and be faithful.

B. Regardless of where we are in this stage of life, remember who you belong to.

1. Jesus bought you with a price, the price of His blood.

2. When we give our lives to Jesus, we accept Him as Lord and Savior and must remain faithful, submissive, and obedient.

C. This morning, I want to lead us in a prayer of commitment.

1. Simply put: I want to lead this congregation in declaring our allegiance to Jesus.

2. Jesus, where you lead, I will follow; where you want me to go, I will go; I will speak what you have me to speak and be silent when you want me silent.

3. Lord, I am yours; Use me.

1. https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/nero-man-behind-myth/slavery-ancient-rome#:~:text=Scholars%20estimate%20about%2010%25%20(but,and%20ten%20million%20were%20enslaved. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20latest%20Global,of%20modern%20slavery%20are%20children [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)