

The Parables of Jesus #35
The Parable of the Unprofitable Servants
(Lk. 17:7-10)
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INTRODUCTION

A. Most of us have grown up believing many things that are common to what might be called the “American Philosophy”

1. We believe in the freedom of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”
2. We believe the principle of “democratic government”
3. We believe that if a person works hard they should and will receive the rewards of their labor

B. The last one gives us no little trouble when applied to spiritual matters

1. Salvation is not a matter of “working” rather it is a matter of grace
2. The Bible constantly uses terms like slave and servant
3. These terms are foreign to most of us
 - a. we don’t believe in slavery -- especially for ourselves
 - b. we don’t understand the implications of servanthood
 - c. in short, our culture of “freedom” may well work against our understanding some things about service to God

C. In tonight’s parable, I believe there is a “lead-in” to the story

1. Luke 17:5-6

And the apostles said to the Lord, ""Increase our faith."
So the Lord said, ""If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, "Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. (NKJ)
2. It may be that the story was intended as part of the answer about how to increase one’s faith
 - a. how does one accept the role of a servant without faith?
 - b. if Jesus is the Lord, that only leaves one position for us, and that’s as his servant
 - c. if the tree (vs 6) was obedient to the man of faith, then would it not also be true that the man of faith would obey his Lord?

D. The question for us is this: would accepting the role of servant increase your faith?

I. THE PARABLE (Lk 17:7-10)

A. Put yourself in the shoes of a master (to his disciples)

1. You have a servant working for you - tending sheep (or cattle) or plowing fields
 - a. I think we can assume this is a busy, hard-working servant
 - b. the idea is that of one who works from sunup to sundown
2. When he comes in from the field, how is he treated?
 - a. do you tell him to sit down and take a break?
 - b. do you tell him to go on and get something to eat?
 - c. of course not -- it is not the master's normal behavior to serve the servant
3. No, instead he is treated much differently
 - a. OK, now that you've taken care of things out in the field, go ahead and get things ready for supper
 - b. when it's ready, call me and I'll eat
 - c. serve me until I'm finished
 - d. afterwards, you can then get yourself something to eat and drink
 - e. isn't that the expected way things happen between servants and masters?

B. Think about what both master and servant expect

1. Does the master stop to thank the servant for going out of his way?
 - a. there's no such thing as "out of the servant's way"
 - b. the only thing expected of the servant is that he will do whatever the master bids him to do -- nothing is "extra" or "overtime"
2. The master did not expect to thank the servant
3. Perhaps more importantly, the servant did not expect it either
4. Jesus certainly didn't think so (vs 9)

C. Jesus' application of the story (vs 10)

1. "So likewise"
 - a. means, "just like that"
 - b. it's obvious a direct application is meant
2. Two things can be said when you've done all you've been commanded
 - a. "we are unprofitable servants"
 - b. "we have done what was our duty to do"
3. Neither statement is attractive to modern-day Americans

II. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. The story reminds us how much we need to understand servanthood

1. Jesus understood that he was a servant
 - a. John 4:34
Jesus said to them, ""My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. (NKJ)
 - b. John 9:4
I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. (NKJ)
2. Do we understand that we are called to be servants as well?
 - a. 2 Cor 4:5
For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. (NKJ)
 - b. 2 Tim 2:24
And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, (NKJ)
 - c. Rev 1:1
The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants-- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, (NKJ)

B. We must learn to cope with some of the implications of servanthood

1. It is not the servant who is in charge, but the master
2. The servant does not choose how he will serve, nor when he serves
3. It is not for recognition or reward that the servant serves
4. The servant must serve with the proper attitude toward serving
 - a. no self-pity
 - b. no complacency or laziness
 - c. no expectation of a "bonus"
5. What servant ever serves perfectly, or completely

C. Somehow, this should all relate to increasing our faith

1. The function of the servant is essentially that of faith
 - a. there must be a great deal of trust in the master
 - b. there must be an extraordinary sense of surrender of self to one's master
 - c. there must be a definite willingness to act on behalf of one's master
2. Is Jesus saying faith grows as we exercise faith itself?

CONCLUSION

A. Let's try to make this a specific and practical application

1. How's your faith today?
2. Follow that up with another question: how are you doing as a servant?
3. Are you more into what the master will do for you, or what you will do for the master?
4. How you answer question 3 may determine how you answer numbers 1 and 2

B. The stories of Jesus are so powerful because they are often so simple

1. Who really misunderstands the story in our text tonight?
2. Who really doesn't struggle with the application in vs. 10?

C. Invitation