

The Stories Of Jesus Part 7

Unworthy Servants

Matthew 18:21-35, 20:1-16, Luke 17:7-10

Memory Verses: Luke 17:10

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

We're in a series about the parables called The Stories of Jesus. A parable is a short story using an easily understood concept to teach a spiritual truth. Think of how "The Three Little Pigs" is a fun interesting story for kids, but it teaches us to have a good work ethic. Instead of taking the quick route of building with sticks, we should be willing to put in the hard laborious work of stacking bricks so that when the big bad wolf comes he won't huff and puff and blow our house down.

We see this same concept with the parables like the sower and the seed, and the mustard seed, and the prodigal son.

This week we are going to be looking at three parables that all have to do with being servants of God. Let me ask you a question. What does it mean to be a servant of God? Perhaps when you hear the phrase, "servant," you balk. Perhaps you feel that the word is too demeaning or patriarchal. I think many think the word "servant" is a word reserved for a more primitive time in our past. No one should be a servant in today's progressive world of freedom and civil rights.

And this is where we as believers must adopt a different philosophy than the popular opinion of the day. The Bible speaks about servitude a lot. All the way from the beginning to the end. Genesis to Revelation. Even in the perfect Garden of Eden, Adam was told to serve the planet and the animals, Eve was told to serve her husband; Adam, and as husband and wife, they were told to serve each other. After the fall, Noah was told to serve God by building a cruise liner for animals. Abraham was told to serve God by leaving his homeland in search for an unknown place. Abraham was later told to serve God by sacrificing his son Isaac on the altar. Moses was told to serve God by leading the Israelites out of Egypt. He was also told to serve the people for 40 years while they wandered in the wilderness. Joshua, the Judges, David, Solomon, they were all commanded to serve God and to serve others.

And of course there is Jesus, who being God in the flesh served the Father by humbling himself to become a man and die on the cross for our sins. There is no greater act of service than to die for others. And this is what Jesus has called us to do as we follow him.

When you think about it, there is no such thing as a Christian who doesn't serve. Our faith and religion is defined by who we serve and how we serve. To be a Christian is to be a servant. In a world filled with

people longing to be served by others, we are called to serve others and God, sacrificially, without hesitation. It is through our service that we show the love of the God we serve. Today we will see that **Though Servitude Can Seem Demeaning, And Though We Are Called To Serve God And Others, We Are Still Unworthy Of Such An Assignment** .

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see today is that... **A Servant Of God & Others Must Not Deny Others The Forgiveness That God Has Granted Them**. We get this in The Parable of The Unforgiving Servant in **Matthew 18:21-35**.

The question is, "Is there a limit on how many times we should forgive someone?" **Amos 2:6**, and **Job 33:29** had been used by the Jewish people as means of setting up a practice of pardoning someone of their sins only 3 times. Peter, knowing Jesus always tended to push beyond Jewish tradition, in asking his question actually makes a suggestion. Instead of three times, perhaps we should forgive someone seven times. Is that what you were thinking Lord? Jesus answers, not seven times but seventy-seven times.

What does that mean? Does Jesus want us to only forgive someone exactly seventy-seven times? Does he mean that on the seventy-eighth offense are we to part ways with the offender, break all ties, and hold a grudge. Listen, if this were the case, Lisa, my kids, the deacons, everyone in my small group, and every person I've ever known would have probably already walked away from Shevi. Lets be honest, I'm a mess. And I'm need of forgiveness. But, of course this isn't what Jesus is saying. Yes, 7 is better than 3, and yes 77 is better than 7, but what Jesus is trying to convey is that we are to never stop extending forgiveness and grace towards those who sin against us. Never!

Now, of course this flies in the face of the wisdom of this world. By a show of hands, how many of you have received this advice at some point in your life, after someone that you have had a relationship with has done you wrong for the 20th time. Here's the advice; "You have to remove toxic people from your life and move on." We all have, right? Why, because that's the prevailing wisdom of people who don't know Christ. In fact, you may have heard this advice from people who are in the church. It sounds like good advice. Don't let leaches and soul-suckers destroy who you are. You must cut them out of your life. But that's not what Jesus says.

Jesus tells us a story about a king who forgives a servant, and what happens when that same servant chooses to not forgive another servant. The king throws him in jail because even though he was forgiven, he did not forgive others. Notice that the money in this parable is likened to our sins against God and sins against one another. The king forgives the man of a great sin while the servant cannot forgive his fellow man of a small sin.

What can we learn from this story? Three things. One, sin against God, represented by the King in this story, demands a debt that cannot be repaid. Two, sin against God is so much greater than any sin we could ever suffer at the hands of another person. And three, which is the most important lesson; **If we have been forgiven the debt of our sin against God, we must forgive others their sins against us.**

Now, I can see the wheels turning and I already know what your next question is... how can we be expected to keep forgiving people who don't learn their lesson and are just abusing our relationship because they know that we will forgive them? It's not fair! **Exactly! It's not fair, unless you recognize a fundamental truth that we often forget. We have sinned against God, but through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross, we have been forgiven. A monumental debt that we could not pay has been expunged from our record. And then we sin again, but it's still covered. And then we sin again, still covered. Again, and again, and again, we fall into sin, spit in the face of our God, run from his will, turn our backs on our faith, and again and again... forgiven! He will never not forgive us. That's what's not fair. And it's not fair that though we are habitual sinners forgiven and shown grace, we still refuse to recognize that the same sin in others is the same sin in us. We judge and condemn and excommunicate other sinners, while all the while forgetting that we are just the same. We expect them to show us mercy and forgiveness and grace when we mess up, but when the tables are turned we refuse to do the same for them. How dare we. We deserve to be thrown into prison forever.**

And that's exactly what this parable says will happen. Those who have been forgiven of much, must forgive much, or they have not truly received forgiveness in the first place. Simply put, those who refuse to forgive others when they sin, don't understand the forgiveness of God and are not saved. They will be thrown into hell one day. We are absolutely and utterly unworthy of the forgiveness we've received, and thus, we are not allowed the sin of refusing to forgive others. We serve both God and man through forgiveness. **Though Servitude Can Seem Demeaning, And Though We Are Called To Serve God And Others, We Are Still Unworthy Of Such An Assignment.**

The second thing that we need to see today is that... **A Servant Of God & Others Does Not Dispute The Grace That God Gives To Others.** We see this through The Parable of The Workers In The Vineyard in **Matthew 20:1-16.**

The question here, expressed by Peter in **Matthew 19:27** is, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" In other words, "what will God give me for following him?" Peter wants to know that our hard work for the Lord will be worth it not just in Heaven,

but here in this life as well. Do you ever feel this way? Do you ever think to yourself, I have done this or that for you Lord, now what's in it for me?

The answer lies within the parable. The landowner hires four sets of workers throughout the day for a denarius (a day's wage). The first he hires in the early morning, the last he hires one hour before closing time. Everyone gets paid what was agreed upon, yet when the first workers see that the last workers received the same payment, they were frustrated.

Now this should make sense to us. Just look to the Psalms where a majority of them revolve around the theme of the injustice of the wicked prospering while the righteous don't. David, on the run from Saul, cries out in anguish, why do the wicked live in lavish riches while the righteous live in caves? This theme of providential justice is a common one which runs throughout all of humanity. We all want those who do what's right to receive good things and those who do what's wrong to receive bad things. It doesn't seem fair that those who worked longer hours got paid the same amount as those who only worked a short time. But that's not what is the key factor here. We easily overlook that they all got paid what they all believed was a generous amount.

There are several lessons to be learned here about what it means to be a servant of both God and others. First, **God determines who and how he will show grace. We should accept it without question.** Secondly, when God shows the same grace to those who have seemingly labored less as he does to those who have seemingly labored more, we should praise God for unconditional grace. None of us have worked as hard as we think we have, and none of us have worked as little as others may claim. God loves and blesses the missionary who has been on the field for 50 years and God loves and blesses the regular church goer who's only mission field has been their neighborhood. **Lastly, The message in verse 16, "the last will be first, and the first last," is that no matter how long or how hard a believer works during his lifetime, the reward of eternal life will be the same given to all—an eternity of bliss in heaven in the presence of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The thief on the cross in Luke 23:39-43, whose life of service was limited to a moment of repentance and confession of faith in Christ, received the same reward of eternal life as the apostle Paul. Of course, Scripture also teaches that there are different rewards in heaven for different services, but the ultimate reward of eternal life will be achieved by all equally.**

We serve God by accepting his grace to us and to others without comparing the two. Regardless if we have worked much or little, we are still unworthy of his grace. And, we serve others by praising God and rejoicing with them over the grace that God has granted them. Ultimately we serve both by working to see all come to Christ. **Though Servitude Can Seem Demeaning, And Though We Are Called To Serve God And Others, We Are Still Unworthy Of Such An Assignment.**

Lastly, we need to see that... **A Servant Of God & Others Should Not Desire, Nor Expect Recognition For Doing Their Duty.**

We see this through The Parable of the Unworthy Servants in **Luke 17:7-10.**

Servants in this story are akin to employees today. When I waited tables in college, one time I waited on a very large party, around 15. I worked tirelessly to serve them, get them refills, make sure their food was perfect, and devoted the entirety of my shift to their needs. After they left I was expecting a very nice tip only to find out that... they stiffed me! I was upset. I was very upset. Almost to the point of tears. And I remember my boss saying, suck it up, if you wait tables this happens, its all a part of the job.

The point i'm trying to make is that... when we become Christians we are signing up to become servants of God. We are now on his staff and our mission is to only do his will. I think one of the biggest struggles we have today as believers is this idea of credit. We don't say, I'm only serving God for the credit, or I'm only serving others for the credit. We go into serving with the right intentions. But sometimes serving God and others means long hours, hard work, working behind the scenes, working without any thanks, or pats on the back, oratta boys, or any recognition. What are we to do when we serve in thankless unrecognized areas for God and others? Are we to complain? Are we to make our contributions known? Are we to quit and find another ministry where our efforts will be praised? No. Why? Cause we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty!

I don't think I need to belabor this point. Even as Christian we like to be thanked and recognized, but that is a worldly concept. Perhaps the last worldly concept we have yet to shake. When we serve God and others we should do it without any thought of recognition what so ever. Why? Two reasons; First, it's a privilege. We are unworthy to serve in the first place. To be saved is all the reward we should ever want. We are not worthy of his love, his salvation and his church, and yet he freely gives it to us. And though he doesn't need us to fulfill his mission, he has allowed us to be a part of completing it. Secondly, It's our duty. When we were saved, we were bought with a price. We are no longer our own but we are now his. The life we now live we live for Jesus and by Jesus. We are soldiers on the front line and to abandon our post would be treason. This is what we signed up for. We don't need any medals, we don't need any ticker tape parades, we don't need any monuments. We only did what we felt called to do! **It is a privilege to serve, and it is our calling to serve.** If anyone needs recognition it is our great God who has allowed us this honor. **Though Servitude Can Seem Demeaning, And Though We Are Called To Serve God And Others, We Are Still**

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Application

When I think of servants I think of Cinderella on her knees cleaning the floors of her stepmothers mansion. I think of janitors cleaning bathrooms or garbage men collecting trash. Why? Because perhaps I think that those jobs could be seen as demeaning. Maybe in my sinful mind I think that those jobs are beneath me. If that is the way I feel, then I must repent.

But I think in the Christian church there are many so called believers who look at many ministry positions as demeaning and beneath them as well. What about serving in the children's ministry. It is often a thankless job where you have to care for rowdy children for long periods of time, especially when the long winded pastor goes over every single week. Sometimes they have to change diapers, and then clean up the messes and then they go home, often without a hint of appreciation. I hope that doesn't happen often, but I know it happens. Or what about the most thankless job in the whole church... the person who does the media. Every week you have to find slides that Shevi forgot to put in, every week your ever mistake is clear to all, and every week you walk out of that booth with no one to say, good job.

Conclusion

But guess what? Your job is not demeaning. Not in the least! Your job is a part of the body of Christ. Your service shines bright in the eyes of the Lord. And one day, you will be rewarded greatly for your many years of service. Listen, there are no demeaning jobs in the body of Christ! But there are unworthy servants. And that is all of us! So what do we do? We serve as unto the Lord without thought for what's in it for us! We are unworthy servants simply fulfilling our duty to our Savior!

We serve in the way we forgive, and forgive, and forgive again. Perhaps the hardest job we've been assigned is to forgive those who are not worthy of that forgiveness. But we also aren't worthy of it and yet God has given it to us. We serve in the way we welcome God's grace in the lives of others instead of begrudging the fact that they were blessed and we were not. None of us are worthy of salvation and so we praise God for those who are saved for 50 years and those who are saved in the eleventh hour. And we serve by doing all of this without thought of recognition or reward. It is simply a reward to be able to serve.

So what do you need to do? Who do you need to continue to serve today? Who do you need to rejoice with because of the grace of God in their life today? And where do you need to begin serving or continue serving for the Lord today? **Though Servitude Can Seem Demeaning, And Though We Are Called To Serve God And Others, We Are Still Unworthy Of Such An Assignment**