Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Four Hallmarks of Humility, Part 3
Scripture: Luke 17:5-10
Code: 42-219

We open our Bibles to the seventeenth chapter of the gospel of Luke...Luke chapter 17. We are working our way through Luke, this is year 11 and we are in chapter 17 and this is a wonderful thing. It's so hard to move any more speedily because the depth and the richness of God's truth captivates our heart and holds us still until we have imbibed all the richness that we can find in these texts.

But we're looking at the opening ten verses of chapter 17 and we have spent a couple of weeks already looking at it and we'll finish it up this morning. Let me read these ten verses to you, Luke chapter 17 verses 1 through 10. "And He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, then that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times saying, I repent, forgive him.' And the Apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.' And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and be planted in the sea and it would obey you. But which of you having a slave plowing or tending sheep would say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat?' 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?' He doesn't thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? 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."

Upon the first reading of that passage of Scripture, you might conclude that these are some disconnected sections out of the teaching of Jesus that are hard to put together. But that would be a wrong conclusion. There is nothing in the record of Luke to indicate anything other than that Jesus said this sequentially as it appears in the text. And in a very typical fashion as Luke many times does, he presents Jesus speaking to His disciples interrupted by a question which redirects him to provide an answer.

The heart of the matter is found in the warning in verse 3 where our Lord says, "Be on your guard." That very same Greek phrase is elsewhere translated on a number of occasions, "Beware," and most of the time when that is used by our Lord, it is in direct reference to the Pharisees and the scribes. It

is a frequently used phrase by which Jesus warns His followers of the deadly influence of false religious leaders, namely the Pharisees and the scribes who were the dominant religious force in Judaism. They were the definers of the theology of Judaism at the time of our Lord. They had basically the pervasive influence because their theology reigned supreme in the synagogue system which took it down to the grass roots. Though they were the religious leaders of Israel, they were producing not sons of God, but Jesus said they were producing sons of hell because of their heresy and their hypocrisy...a deadly combination.

Our Lord then sets His teaching in this text against the negative example of the ever-present Pharisees and scribes who were in most of the crowds to whom He spoke. And on occasion He speaks directly to them as well as directly to the disciples, as well as generally to the massive crowd. It seems as though every large crowd could be broken down to at least these two groups, there were those who were following Him and there were the ever-present Pharisees and scribes who were trying to hold on to their power and influence over the people and find a way to get rid of Jesus. They were deadly. Heresy and hypocrisy is a damning combination.

If there was one attribute that generally characterized them, and for that matter all false religious leaders, and for that matter all sinners, it is the characteristic of pride. Pride is that dominant sin, that motivational sin behind all kinds of sins. It is that sin that God hates most. It appears in the Old Testament at the top of God's hate list. It is the sin of pride that caused Lucifer to be thrown out of heaven, along with all those angels who joined in his rebellion. It is pride that caused Eve to be thrown out of the garden, along with Adam who complied with her. Proverbs 16:5 says, "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Assuredly he will not go unpunished."

Well the Pharisees and the scribes had developed pride into an art form. And so, in the last months of our Lord's life as He trains true spiritual leaders in Israel, apostles and disciples, it is critical that they understand that what He is asking for is in exact opposition to what they're used to. The flesh by its nature, the fallen unredeemed flesh is proud and it will turn pride into a virtue, as you well know from the culture in which you live. That's bad enough, but when you compound it with religious pride, spiritual pride which takes it to a higher level of virtue and you sell that as if that's legitimate religion, it is a difficult disconnect to remove people from those things which are both instinctive to their fallenness and cultivated in them from their youth as virtuous. And so Jesus spends a lot of time teaching His disciples about humility, while at the same time they're having discussions about which of them will be the greatest in the Kingdom. And even so audacious, a couple of them to send their mother to ask Jesus if they can please be on His right hand and left hand and when that was unfolded, the rest of the disciples were angry not because they were more humble but because the two of them got there first. They were struggling deeply with these issues of humility, it just wasn't part of their nature and nor was it part of their religious culture.

Matthew chapter 23 is a massive diatribe against the religious leaders of Israel that goes on and on and on and it opens up by defining their pride and ostentation and hypocrisy. And then it has in its middle a long litany of damnation, or curses, against this kind of pride. Clearly this had such influence even on the disciples and the apostles that it was a massive effort on the part of our Lord to undo it and to bring about a genuine understanding of humility. To show you how difficult it was, even toward the end of His ministry, after three years of teaching them about humility, they are still arguing about which of them is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom.

This is about humility. It doesn't say humility here, it doesn't use the word humility, it doesn't use the word humble. But these are lessons about humility set against the backdrop of the evident manifest pride of the Pharisees and the scribes. We've already gotten into this a little bit and I'm not going to take time to go back over things. Suffice it to say that there are four elements of humility that appear in this text...four of them. Now we know that the Lord has said to them already, Luke 14:11, that God will humble the proud and exalt the humble. And this will be repeated again in the eighteenth chapter and the fourteenth verse as well. And so God has defined very simply that you better humble yourself if you want God to exalt you. They understand that. That's the big principle.

But what does that look like? What does it mean to be humble? How do humble people act? There aren't any models for this that are manifest, or not many. So Jesus gives us some hallmarks of humility. The first one is restraint from offense...restraint from offense. Verses 1 and 2, "He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come.'" The Pharisees were very adept at putting stumbling blocks, scandalous stumbling blocks in front of people to hinder them on their spiritual journey. That's why they were producing sons of hell. They did it by their heresy and their hypocrisy. But the humble don't do that. The humble don't flaunt their freedoms and liberties. The humble don't say this is what we teach and no matter what effect it has we're going to be faithful to it. The humble don't live hypocritical lives that set bad examples. He is calling for the kind of life that leaves no offense, that causes no entrapment, that seduces no one into error or into evil. In fact, in verse 2 comes the warning, "You would be better off to die a horrible death, having a millstone tied around your neck and to be dropped in the middle of the sea than to cause one of these little ones...not children, not infants, not toddlers, but believers...these little ones who believe in Me...it says in Matthew in the passage that is very similar to this, the eighteenth chapter. It's a very dangerous thing to cause the people of God to fall into heresy and into iniquity." Humble people don't do that. Humble people understand they have a responsibility to the truth for the sake of others. They have a responsibility to spiritual integrity for the sake of others, to teach what is true, as we have seen, and to live what is right.

The second thing, and we've already discussed it, is the humble are not only marked by restraint from offense but readiness to forgive...readiness to forgive. Another aspect of their true holiness is if a

brother sins, they rebuke him, if he repents, they forgive him, if he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times saying I repent, forgive him. They are known by their eagerness to forgive. They are magnanimous, they are merciful, they are gracious. They are forgiving even offenses against them seven times a day, which is simply a way of saying endlessly, without limit. This is totally contrary to how the Pharisees conducted themselves. They had nothing but disdain for sinners. They wouldn't so much as go near the riff-raff that accumulated around Jesus. The rabbis seven..said, "Even so much as to teach them the Law," they kept their distance to carry on the masquerade of their holiness. They had no interest in them. They had nothing but contempt for them. They associated them with Satan. They were not interested in their repentance. They were not interested in offering them grace or mercy. Contrary to this, Jesus says, "Those who are humble are eager to forgive, even those who repeatedly again and again and again and again and again sin against them. That's what humble people do. That's what lowly people do. They are magnanimously merciful, gracious and forgiving. And in the first place, while they will not purposely lead someone into sin, they are eager to lead someone out of sin.

Now that brings us to the final two, that brief review. The third characteristic is so important. Humble people not only are marked by restraint from offense and readiness to forgive, but, thirdly, recognition of weakness...recognition of weakness. At first it seems a bit obtuse in verse 5, out of the midst of this statement by Jesus concerning how humble people conduct themselves, the Apostles collectively represented by one of them, asks a question. "The Apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith.'" Some commentators have said this has got to come from a different time and a different place and a different discussion cause it doesn't make any sense. Oh I think it makes perfect sense and I'll show you why.

First of all, just a brief comment. The Apostles have to do with the Twelve...the Twelve selected by our Lord, as you remember back in chapter 6 verses 12 through 16, where we talked about Jesus calling the Twelve to Himself...the Twelve become the Apostles that we know so familiarly as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They are sent out to preach in the ninth chapter the first ten verses, and we really haven't heard from them since chapter 9. There is an allusion or reference to them in chapter 11 verse 49, but they haven't appeared on the scene since chapter 9. They are, of all people, most privileged. They are of all people in this world most honored to have been called personally and sovereignly by the Lord Jesus Christ to be His representative, to be His messenger, to become an eyewitness of the resurrection, to be the first generation of preachers, to be given power over disease, and power over death, and power over demons, to be sent out with that power to authenticate the message of the gospel of the Kingdom. What an immense privilege. And they were frankly nobodies. One of them was a zealot, one of them was a despised tax collector, between four and seven of them were fishermen, the rest were craftsmen of some kind or another.

They were basically from Galilee which was no significant place at all and they sustained their homes in Galilee through the ministry that the Lord gave them. They were just nobodies...no rabbis, no Pharisees, no scribes, no Sadducees, no synagogue leaders, they were just twelve ordinary men. But they became extraordinarily privileged. They become the foundation of the church. Ephesians 2:20 says the Lord builds His church on the foundation of the Apostles. They become the authors of Scripture. They become the men through whom the Lord writes much of the New Testament. It was through them and those who associated with them that the New Testament was written. They were given this kind of power to demonstrate that they truly represented God and they manifest what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 12:12 the signs of an Apostle. They will become and it's promised to be so the rulers in the Kingdom, ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel. And there will be massive indications of their name on the foundation stones of the eternal city, the capital city of heaven, the New Jerusalem. Talk about twelve privileged men. Judas falls out of the Twelve because of his apostasy and is replaced by a man named Matthias. But these are remarkable men...remarkable men. They had already begun to preach. They had already begun to see the power unleashed through their lives. But as privileged as they were, they were equally human, very, very human. In fact, five times Jesus said this to them, "O you of little faith..." You won...you wonder, how could someone who has had that experience walking and being with Jesus, seeing massive display of miracles, even performing some, hearing Him preach, being taught by Him, nurtured by Him, discipled by Him day in and day out, preaching yourself, seeing the impact negative and positive, how could one continue to have little faith? But they did. And here we are in the last few months before the cross and their response to what Jesus just says is, "Lord, increase our faith." They're saying, "This is a huge leap, this is completely contrary to what we've always been taught. This is completely contrary to natural impulses."

Living with this kind of care, never to teach anything that is in error, but always to rightly represent the truth so no one is harmed or hindered in their spiritual progress because they've been taught something that isn't right...to live your life in such a godly fashion that you never cause another person to see anything in your life that leads them down a path of disobedience, sets a bad example. Who can live like that? That is such a demanding standard. And then, to be so merciful and so gracious along with being so committed to holiness that you confront sinners and no matter what they might have done to you repeatedly, you just continually to try to restore and restore and restore and restore and you're just magnanimously forgiving them all the time. This is contrary to the normal and this is contrary to the religious patterns that we've been taught. They're just essentially saying, "I don't think we're up to this. Lord, You're going to have give us more than we've got to live like that."

And this, I tell you, folks, is where the humble live. The humble live with a sense of their own inadequacy. This marks true saints. This admission of weakness, this honesty, this is Paul in Romans 7, "I do what I don't want to do, I don't do what I ought to do." This is Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 1 where the Apostle Paul says, "Look, I am the chief of sinners." You live with a constant sense of disappointment. This is Paul finally coming to some kind of an epiphany where he gets it,

when the Lord gives him a painful spear, as 2 Corinthians 12 should be interpreted, rammed through his otherwise proud flesh and humbles him. And in humbling him, Paul comes to the conclusion that he has now found the secret to power, for when I'm weak, he says, then I'm...what?...then I'm strong. The true children of God, the true disciples of Jesus Christ are humble. They're humble enough to submit themselves to Scripture and to virtue so that they lead people in the direction of holiness, don't scandalize them, they're humble enough as well to confront sin in someone else lovingly, to be magnanimously merciful and forgiving, and they're humble enough to know that they are weak themselves. That's why Paul says, "When you restore a brother," Galatians 6, "consider yourself lest you also be tempted." There but by the grace of God go I is often said in that regard.

The humbled are quick to understand their inadequacies. The Apostle Paul says in the Colossians letter, chapter 1 verse 29, "I labor, I work to the point of sweat and exhaustion, and yet...he says...it's the power of God working through me." Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, "I preach but I don't preach with the superior speech or human wisdom, cleverness, manipulation. I preach the simple clear message of the gospel that your faith might not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

You say, "Well that's fine, but how does it all connect with this context?" Well it connects with this context because this is their response to setting an impossible standard. Increase our faith, Lord. Look, we...You're calling on us to teach truth and to live truly and to live graciously and to forgive people who wound us and do it repeatedly and this is asking a lot out of us.

They're feeling the weight of this kind of spiritual responsibility and they're honest about their weakness. And so they say, "Increase," imperative aorist from *prostithemi* meaning add to, supplement, develop, grow. They're not denying that they have faith, they just don't know if they're ever going to be adequate for this. Who can live like that? Paul...Paul has that sense back in 2 Corinthians 2 where he's talking about we always triumph in Christ, and our lives are a savor of life to life and death to death, and you just grab that thought and you say, "You mean your life compounds someone's damnation? Or your life and your influence leads to someone's exaltation? Your life can be a savor of death to death or life to life? Who is adequate...he says...for such things? Who in themselves in the human could ever have a life with such massive impact?"

Now we have the idea that the movers and shakers are in Washington. That's not true. They don't change anything eternally ever. The movers and shakers are in the universities with all their ideas and philosophies and ideologies, and scientific events, they don't change anything forever. Movers and shakers are in the Kingdom of God because they are the ones who influence people eternally. Who is adequate for that? Who is adequate to teach the truth, to change lives? Who is adequate to live the truth, to set an example of godliness, to make the message of transformation believable?

Who is adequate to be so magnanimous and so gracious and so forgiving as to forgive someone who offends them repeatedly on a daily basis and extend nothing to them but grace and a desire for restoration? This is asking a lot...increase our faith.

Well, the Lord understood their question and He agreed with it. So He says in verse 6, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree," a couple of times He said this only there was a mountain nearby so He used the mountain as an illustration. Here He's standing by a mulberry tree so He uses it. "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." You're right. You do need a stronger faith. He affirms it. It's a good question, it's the right question, and it's absolutely true. If you just had a small amount of faith, you would have enough faith to have a powerful life.

Now let's talk a little agronomy for a minute here, agriculture. Look at the mustard seed, mustard has been around a long time. Some of you remember when your mother rubbed it on your chest, right? There are a lot of different uses. Mustard didn't always come in a yellow plastic container. It's an herb and it's been used in the ancient Middle East for centuries, millennia. There were a number of seeds that were used sort of semi-domestically that grew plants for food that the families ate. And of those seeds, the smallest one, not the smallest seed in the world, but the smallest of those common seeds in the land of Israel used for food was the mustard seed. And so in Matthew 13:31 Jesus refers to it as the smallest, smaller than any other of the seeds that were used in the gardens of the people of Israel. And the thing that made it so interesting was as small as it was, as tiny as it was, it grew disproportionately.

And a typical mustard bush or tree could be twelve to fifteen feet in height and in width as well. And that's a lot coming from a tiny, tiny little seed. And so Jesus is simply saying this, if you just had mustard-seed kind of faith...what does that mean?...growing faith. If you just had the kind of faith that grows and expands and develops, you could...you could do amazing things. And He's still talking in a sort of agricultural fashion, so He says, "You could...you could say to this mulberry tree, be uprooted and planted in the sea." The rabbis...some of the rabbis used to say that the mulberry tree had roots that would survive for 600 years. And so to uproot a mulberry tree would be a significant thing to do. And then to have it move across the sky and plant itself in the middle of the sea would be even more significant, that would be absolutely supernatural.

Now what in the world is the Lord saying here? Is He saying that if we had enough faith we could actually move a tree? Or if we had enough faith we could actually move a mountain from here to there? Now, that's to trivialize the idea. He's talking proverbially, He's talking metaphorically. He's talking in analogies. They all understood that. They knew He wasn't talking about moving trees around. The point of our Lord's lesson is simply this, you have if you will trust Me and trust My

strength the power to do what is supernatural what you cannot do humanly. That's what He's saying. By the way, the mulberry tree is probably...it's in the Greek it's *sukaminos*, some call it a sycamine tree just transliterating that. It's not a sycamore tree, that's a different kind of tree. This tree occurs also in 2 Samuel 5 and 1 Chronicles 14, it's a part of the willow tree family, or a cottonwood tree. You know what that? A kind of tree that grows in a semi-arid area. And they used to say silkworms lived in these kinds of trees. They grew all over the place in the Jordan Valley. So they knew about these trees and they knew the character of them that one happened to be sitting right there so Jesus says, "If you had enough faith you could move this mulberry tree to the middle of the ocean." He's saying in a manner of speaking a small growing faith, a small expanding faith can do unimaginable things. Why? Because as you entrust yourself to the power of God, He does His work through you. The Lord is not saying do pointless things, He's not saying do crowd-pleasing tricks. He is saying you don't think you can live a godly life, you don't think you can always speak the truth correctly. You don't think you can set a pure example so no one stumbles. You're not sure you can live such a magnanimous, generous, merciful forgiving life. You're not sure you can do that and I'm telling you, if you will continue to trust Me, My power through you will accomplish all of that. That's what He's saying.

When, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "When I'm weak then I'm strong." Ephesians 6:10, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." Jesus, as I said, used similar proverbial statements in Matthew 17:20 and Mark 11:23, in those cases He used a mountain as His illustration, but at the end of both of those He said...here's the point, "Nothing shall be impossible to you." Well that "nothing" has to be qualified, right? Nothing that God wills and nothing that God asks shall be impossible. You say you don't think you could live like that? You can live like that when you don't trust in your own flesh. That becomes the basis of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and what it means to walk in the Spirit, or to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly to yield to the power of God in your life. That's what it's all about.

Maybe a good illustration is in John 14...John 14, and we won't spend a lot of time with this, but it's such a wonderful text. The disciples the night when Jesus was betrayed were struggling through all kinds of things, wondering about what their future was going to be like. So in John 14:12 Jesus says this, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also." That's pretty shocking. You put your trust in Me, you put your faith in Me and the works that I do you will do. He further says, this is even more shocking, "And greater than these." Not greater works, not works is not in the original. "And greater than these shall he do because I go to the Father." Not greater in terms of kind, but greater in terms of extent. You will be able to do things that change people's lives. As long as Jesus was on earth, His power was limited to His presence. Wherever He was, His power was expressed. Wherever the Twelve were, their power was expressed. When the seventy were sent out, wherever they were they was expressed but it was confined to the land of Israel and no further. But when Jesus went to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit, the Day of Pentecost, the

explosion began and we have not done greater works, you couldn't do greater works than the greatest work Jesus does and the greatest work Jesus does is raise the spiritually dead, right? The greatest work is the work of regeneration, the work of salvation, the work of conversion, transformation, the new birth that's discussed in John 3. That's the great work of Jesus, that's what He came to do...to seek and to save that which was lost, to bring salvation. That work is the greatest work that He did, we can't do a greater work but we are used by God to do it at a greater extent. The limits are off and we have been used along with all the generations prior to this generation to take the gospel to the ends of the earth and to go to those places and to teach the truth and to live the truth and to live a gracious and forgiving life, to do all the things that seem impossible. We do them because when Jesus went back to heaven, it says if you follow the text, "I will ask the Father, He'll give you another helper that He may be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth." Jesus goes back, He sends the Spirit, the Spirit comes and we are now empowered as we entrust our lives to the power of God and the indwelling Spirit. We can do everything that He asks. And that's what it says in John 14, "Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it that the Father may be glorified in the Son." "In My name" means consistent with who I am, consistent with My will.

What are we saying? We're saying that the disciples are honest. They're humble enough to say this is beyond us, this isn't natural, this isn't what we've been taught. How in the world are we going to live such lives? How are we going to exist in such a high standard? How is that possible? How can we live a life that doesn't cause people to stumble at all? How can we be so generous and magnanimous when harmed? How can we live that way? And the answer comes, "If you just put your trust in Me, I will empower you to live that way." You can go forward boldly to do My will, to do whatever I have commanded you to do...as Jesus says in Matthew 28:19 and 20, and I will give you the power to do that. "Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all he can ask or think according to the power that works in us," Ephesians 3:20-21, even that power which raised Jesus from the dead. So we come into the world and we are the powerful people. Through us the truth is proclaimed. Through us godliness is manifest. Through us comes illustrations of grace and forgiveness and mercy and compassion and sympathy with sinners. God uses all of that as means by which He works His powerful saving work so in our weakness we enabled to do these things.

Who is adequate humanly for such usefulness? Who can have a life that matters so much? So we humble acknowledge our weakness and trust fully in our Lord's power to enable us to do His will in our sanctification as we were enabled to do His will in our justification.

A final point, humble disciples are marked by restraint from offense, readiness to forgive, recognition of weaknesses, and finally, rejection of honor...rejection of honor. And to some people verse 7 seems a little obtuse. All of a sudden Jesus tells a parable. "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?' But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me until I've eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink? He doesn't thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?'"

Isn't that an interesting story? Now, there's something you need to know about the Pharisees in case you didn't know it already, they love to be honored. It's really important to them that they be honored, that the people give them honor. It tells us in Matthew 23:5 they did all their deeds to be noticed by men. They broadened their phylacteries, that's the little boxes that had the Deuteronomic statement about the one God on it, they lengthened the tassels of their garments, they just tried to look religious. People still do that, wear silly religious garb to leave the impression of other worldliness and holiness. They love the place of honor at banquets, the chief seats in the synagogue, respectful greetings in the marketplace, to be called teacher, to be called father, to be called leader. They loved that stuff. In fact, the twentieth chapter of Luke, we'll get to it, verse 26, "Beware of the scribes," same language exactly as be on your guard, "who like to walk around in long robes and love respectful greetings in the marketplaces, chief seats in the synagogues, places of honor at banquets." They wanted all that honor.

And that's completely contrary to the followers of Jesus Christ. Along with the recognition of weakness and trust in God's power, there comes a danger. As God begins to use you, as you live a life that honors Him, as you teach His Word faithfully and as you set an example of spiritual life and as you exhibit grace and mercy, you because you're still fallen, and so am I, may begin to think to yourself that, "You know, I'm not doing half bad at this thing of Christian living. My life's having a profound effect. Through me somebody came to Christ over here, and somebody came over here. And I've been teaching the truth and people are loving that. And my life is sort of in order and I'm glad for that and I was real kind to those folks. And aren't you impressed, God?"

The transition is pretty clear to me. It's easy to get to the place where you become arrogant about your spiritual progress. Is there anything uglier than that? Spiritual pride? Any greater failure to understand that everything is by grace? And so Jesus puts the protection on the backside of this whole thing. When you begin to be useful to God and you begin to see the power of God's flow through your life, there's going to be a temptation by that fallen nature that's still there, that unredeemed humanness to make you feel like you're doing really well and God ought to be fairly impressed with you. And, of course, the Pharisees, they wanted people to be impressed with them because they were sure God was.

So Jesus addresses this with a very simple story. "Which of you," and it's in the form really of a question, as He often did, "having a slave, plowing or tending," so that takes us into the very simple village life, the economy of Israel again and people had slaves. This is *doulos*, a bond slave, which

meant he was basically attached to the owner, lived in his house, was cared for, provided for, not a bad thing, it was a wonderful thing when it was handled well, it was a good thing. It's a perfect illustration of the relationship between a believer and God, between a believer and Christ and therefore in itself is a pure and wonderful kind of relationship on a spiritual level, and it can be good on a human level as well. This was just the way that employment was handled. And it was better than being a day laborer because a day laborer had to hope somebody would show up and hire him every day and go back to the marketplace standing there hoping that that would happen. But a *doulos*was bound to a master and cared for, kept in the home like a family member and did his work there. "Which of you if you have a *doulos*and he goes out and does his work, he's busy plowing, tending sheep, whatever it is, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat?'"

Now this is the picture of a small farm, probably a one-servant household, could be more but perhaps. This is a guy who sort of does everything. He has to take care of the sheep. He has to take care of the field and then his job is also to prepare a meal. "Now which of you are going to say to him when he comes in from the field, 'Wow, you've done so well, sit down and take a load off your feet and let me serve you?'" You're not going to do that anymore than your boss is going to come to you after you've worked for five hours and say, "You know, you've done so well in five hours, take a break for three hours. Go home." Wait a minute, don't I have no more value than that? I'm...I'm supposed to do what I'm supposed to do because you're paying me for an eight-hour day, right?

Well this is the way this whole system worked then as well. He had a job. He understood exactly what that job required. And he understood that it was not asking more of him than was expected for him to do what was required by the job. And what was required by the job was you work a long day and you take care of the field and you take care of the sheep and you come in and you give what this particular meal is about three o'clock in the afternoon, it's not the eight o'clock meal, it's not the last meal of the day, it's the mid-afternoon meal and the work is not done until that meal is given to the master. So everybody knows the answer. Which of you is going to say to him, come immediately and sit down to eat? Nobody...nobody, because a servant needs to do his duty.

So verse 9...or verse 8 He says, "Will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat? That's part of your responsibility and properly clothe yourself and serve me. Don't come in here with...smelling like sheep and dirt. Go clean up and get me something to eat," while the master's caring for whatever he's caring for. "And I'll eat and drink and then your day is over and afterward, you eat and you drink." Verse 9, "He doesn't thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he?" That's just an interesting thing, isn't it? They're all rhetorical questions that don't need an answer because everybody knows the answer. Nobody is going to tell the guy that he doesn't have to finish the day's work. They all understand that he is going to say, "Feed me and then come and

eat." They all understand that he's not going to thank...that's the word *charon, charis*, grace. He's not going to favor this guy especially because he hasn't done anything special. He's not a volunteer, he's an employee and he's done what he's paid to do.

Kenneth Bailey who has done so much great work in studying the life in the villages of the ancient Middle East and even modern Middle East, writes this, "In a technological age with a 40-hour week, powerful labor unions and time and a half for overtime, the world of this parable seems not only distant but unfair. After a long, hard day in the field such a servant surely has earned the right to a little appreciation, some comforts and a few rewards. But Jesus is building on a well-known and widely accepted pattern of behavior in the Middle East. The master/servant relationship and its ancient modern expression implies acceptance of authority and obedience to that authority and it's a matter of honor. Yet the outsider needs to be sensitive to the security that this classical relationship provides for the servant, and the sense of worth and meaning that is deeply felt on the part of a servant who serves a great man. These qualities of meaning, worth, security and relationship are often tragically missing from the life of the modern industrial worker with his 40-hour week. The servant offers loyalty, obedience, a great deal of hard work, but with an authentic Middle Eastern nobleman, the benefits mentioned above are enormous." And as I said, this is the mid-afternoon lunch and so the work day is not really over.

Bailey goes on, "Certainly no one in any Middle Eastern audience could imagine any servant expecting special honor after fulfilling his duty. The master is not indebted to him for having plowed the field or guarded the sheep. We're not even dealing with harsh hours imposed by an unfeeling master, but rather the normal expectation of a relatively short day's chores."

And so, everybody knows that he just did what he was supposed to do. Jesus applies it in verse 10. "So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves, we've done only that which we ought to have done.'" Don't pat yourself on the back and think that God's really impressed and that He owes you some special favor. You'll get your reward in heaven. We're not talking about doing something to please men here, we're talking about assuming that somehow God is in your debt. You don't thank the servant for doing what he's supposed to do. And when you and I have done everything we're supposed to do, we're not worthy of some special merit, as if God is now indebted to us. This is all about grace. And the fact of the matter is, no matter what we've done, no matter how well we've done it, we have never been able to do what God is worthy of. So we are unworthy servants, right?

I hate all these honors and awards and plaques, and stuff. It's fine for some things, but not in the Kingdom of God. No matter what we've done, we have to say, "I'm an unworthy servant." And if you say that when they give you one of those deals, it sounds like false humility. This is all about humility.

Humble people reject honor. They know they're not in God's debt. They know they're still living under grace. You are justified by grace, you're being sanctified by grace, you'll be glorified by grace and you'll be rewarded in heaven forever by grace. Never do we merit anything God gives us. And the flip on this is in the...as we noted earlier in the gospel of Luke...you remember when Jesus brings us into His banquet and our labors are done, He sits us down and He serves us. That's totally against the grain of their expectation. But that's going to happen in heaven. That's in our heavenly reward. As long as we're here in this life, we can never do what God deserves. And it is a wonder of wonders, as Paul says again in 1 Timothy 1, that God has chosen to use me who am the chief of sinners. The humble never forget that reality.

When we serve God we serve Him in an inferior way. And never do the humble imagine that they have served God so well as to somehow have impressed Him and obligated Him to give us some special honor, as if He is in our debt. It's ludicrous. And so, Jesus is calling for a kind of life that is just so far away from the Pharisaic example. And we are called to this life today. Humble, so as to always submit to Scripture in doctrine and practice, never then to lead anyone into error or sin. Humble so as to always forgive those who sin against us no matter how many times. Humble so as to be aware always of our own weakness and have a growing dependency on the power of God. Humble so as always to recognize that even our best service falls far short and we are unworthy servants who have only done what we have ought to have done and hardly even that, ascribing all God's gifts then to grace.

Humble yourself like this and you will manifestly demonstrate that you are a true child of God and one day God will exalt you and the Lord will seat you at His table and serve you.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for the helpful, necessary, impactful insights that the words of Jesus bring to bear upon our minds. May we truly humble ourselves, knowing that You give grace to the humble, but You resist the proud. Thank You, Father, for Your precious Word. We believe it and we apply it. In Christ's name. Amen.

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