Luke 17:7-10; I Cor. 10:31-33; The Parable of Expected Service” I. The Master/ Servant Relationship II. The Necessity of Obedience III. The Attitude of Service

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what are the marks of a good employee? Well, a good employee does what is expected of them. They do the work without complaining- working in a manner that pleases the one who hired them. But what are the marks of a good Christian? Here again, a good Christian is one who does what is expected of them- working in a way that pleases the One who purchased us. Today we find a short parable that illustrates a critical point. The question this parable answers is this- Does God owe us anything? Many of us have been raised in Christian homes and we attend conservative churches. It is tempting to compare ourselves to others and to sinfully think that we are better off- that God owes us for being such good people. Of course God would save me- look at how much better I am than others. There are many in the world today who think that God owes them a life of ease- or that God owes them the blessings of heaven- because of what they have done or how they have lived. But this particular parable is going to be teaching the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. These few verses will make it abundantly clear- there is no room for man’s works in the realm of salvation. Works righteousness- or the teaching of Jacob Arminius- is exposed as false. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals our complete dependance on God for our salvation even as we are called to work as servants in His household.

**I. The Master/ Servant Relationship**

In our first point we consider the relationship that sets the stage for this parable. So in 17:7 we find a master and his servant. If any one of you has a servant, what do you expect that servant to do? Well, you expect that servant to serve- to do the work that he is assigned. Servants and slaves could have a whole host of responsibilities- like Joseph who was sold as a slave in Egypt for example. As slave could do everything including manual labor in the field, preparing meals in the home and even educating the children of their master. We do not read how or why this particular person became a slave- either they were a captive from a foreign nation or they had been forced into slavery to pay their own debt. But this master has the claim of right- the servant is viewed as his rightful possession. Now we do not have servants and slaves like this in the US- but we could say it is similar to that of an employee but without the payment part. Today we work for money- to be paid. But the slave was himself the possession- he did not get paid and neither did he expect get praised as we will see. So who is this master? Well, the master in our parable shares similarities with our God. The servant or the slave here would be Jesus’ disciples- those who are members of God’s household. We belong to our God in two primarily ways. First of all, God is our master because He is our creator! We belong to Him because He made us- He has fashioned and formed us- we are in the realm of His created possession. The second way in which we belong to our God is that we have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. As I Peter 1:19 puts it, you were ransomed from your futile ways as you were purchased by the precious blood of Christ. So by the blood of Jesus which has been paid for you- He has purchased your body and soul. So like the servant in our passage, we belong to our master. We are objects created by our heavenly potter- we are dearly loved and ransomed by the blood of our Savior and Lord. Being our Lord, Jesus has the right of ownership. So in order for us to understand this parable we have to see our place in it. God is God- and He is the master, owner, sovereign and lord. We are servants- slaves who have been purchased and paid for. We belong to Him- and He has the right of ownership. To be clear, God is never in debt to man! Man can not and never has given anything to God as if God needed help or aid from us! Although we are called to work within the context of His kingdom, our identity as His possession is already firmly established! I know you hear this a lot from me- but we need to remember that our work does not make us God’s people! What we do does not change our identity- it flows from our identity! God does not need anything from us! He is God! All have and all we do belong to Him! He is the potter, we are the clay! He is the maker, we the product! He is the creator- we the creature! God does not work for us- neither is He indebted to us but rather we are indebted to Him! As Rom. 11:35 put it, who has given a gift to Him that He mib be repaid? As we will see later on- even the work that we do and the gifts that we use indebt us to Him! We use His gifts to obey Him- which only increases our dependence on Him! Lets apply this to our prayers for a moment. God’s people cannot boast about their works before God- because we are simply doing what we must! We are acting as we were created and redeemed to do! Instead of boasting before God by bragging about our works- we should rather ask God for the strength to do what we must! As Saint Augustine put it- “O Lord, command what you will and give what you command.” We are servants- He is God! Now that we understand our identity- how we are to relate to God- it becomes clear that our call to obey is not one we can ignore. Rather we are servants who must obey!

**II. The Necessity of Obedience**

As a reminder, this parable is focusing on how we are to view our place in God’s presence. This parable is teaching us to be humble as we perform our duty- and that our work is a necessary part of our lives. We could use LD 33 makes clear, good works are not only expected but rather they are necessary part of the Christian life. James 2 says that your faith is made known- shown by your works. So as we come to our second point, we find that a faithful servant is known for his works. A good disciple does all that he is commanded! In the context of the employer/ employee relationship, it is possible for someone who is hired to take another job. Added to this, at the end of the day we can leave our work at the workplace as we clock out and head home. But this limit to our labor today does not apply to the master/ servant relationship. There is no clocking out at the end of the day- just as there is no time when we are no longer called to serve our master and lord! Being a Christian is not a part time job! We are never free from this calling to work- to obey! Look again at v. 8. After a long and hard day of tolling in the field this servant comes home. After his very labor-intensive work under the hot sun- bone tired and sweat drenched this servant enters his masters house. Will the master tell the servant to sit back and relax as v. 7 asks? No- the servant is still a servant. The work is not yet finished. So the servant has to prepare supper, change his cloths and serve the master his meal. The fattened calf needs to be butchered, the food heated and served, the dishes prepared. The work here is all consuming- and it takes his entire day! A servant is never his own master! To be clear, a Christian is never off the clock! You do not receive permission to indulge in some sin simply because you had a hard day! You are not your own! No, Jesus has purchased your every breath! Every moment falls under the oversight of your heavenly Father to whom you belong! God’s people receive a calling to obey- to perform their work to the best of their ability. As we read from I Cor. 10, whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God! Lets read from II Tim. 2:3-4. Paul says- that your aim must be to please the one who enlisted you- as a slave serves at the pleasure of his master! So it is that we pray- your will be done! Help me to know and obey your will! That is our desire- and it is our delight! Now Jesus is not saying that the works of the servant make him into a servant. As it is also true- that the servant does not earn anything from the master for simply doing what the servant is supposed to do! Good works are both expected and required! We cannot earn our way into heaven by what we do- nor do our works keep us in God’s grace! But as this parable teaches, a life of humble obedience is not an optional thing! It is never a question- will the servant obey their master? Will the Christian do his Father’s will? Surely He will- for that is our new nature and desire in Christ! Everything we have is from Him- as I Cor. 4:7 put it, what do you have that you did not first receive? Our life and times are in His hand- so the normal, expected and appropriate response is that we do as He asks! Seeking to live in a way that pleases him- discerning what kind of life is pleasing to our God. Obeying the will of our master.

**III. The Attitude of Service**

And yet at the same time, when we do live a life of obedience, we do not think it strange or burdensome! God’s will is not a burden or yoke, but a joy and delight! This is made evident in the attitude of the servant as we find in v. 10. This fact is hard for us to wrap our heads around. A servant who delights to do His master’s will. Or a good employee who thinks nothing of working hard every day. So our parable concludes in v. 9 where the servant does not expect to be thanked. I would do my job even if I was not paid and even if no one ever thanked me. And in v. 10 the servant refers to himself as an unworthy servant who has simply done his duty. It is clear that those who are servants of God do not have an expectation of praise. They have no expectation for a reward! Now to be clear- God has indeed promised to reward the works that God’s people do by faith. But we do not earn this reward- we have no right to claim this reward as if we had merited it! So although a reward is promised, it is not earned or merited! The point that v. 10 is bringing before us is once again the attitude of God’s people. How do we view ourselves and how do we view our works? Well, the servant in our passage calls himself an unprofitable servant. A servant that has not really gained his master anything. If this servant has been purchased by his master- he is simply doing what he was purchased to do. The fact remains, that we can do nothing on our own and we cannot really give God anything that He does not already have! Whatever talents and time we have on earth are first of all gifts from above- gifts that we simply steward. Added to this humble view of their own worth, the faithful servant also has a humble view of their work. As v. 10 concludes, I have only done what was my duty. I have done what I must do- what I was obligated to do- my works are simply performing what is expected of me. As a necessary response to my being purchased, all I have done is my sacred calling and duty. Now doing your duty and fulfilling your calling does not mean that you must be humdrum and stoic. You can and should have a delight in this duty. You can enjoy the work that you are called to perform as you work for the glory of God. But the fact remains, obedience for a Christian is not an option. And we will view ourselves and our work with humility. There is no room for pride in yourself and no room for boasting in your works. That is the application of this parable! To teach us how to properly view our status and the lack of merit in our work. You cannot and will never earn anything from God- there is no possible way for a servant to earn anything from their master.

But this parable is not all that we can learn about our relationship to God. So it is true that God does not owe us anything because we belong to Him. Our obedience and faithful service is the right and expect response of someone who has been purchased. But let’s meditate on the setting of this parable. Normally, the master waits to be served by the servant! The master does not get up from the table to serve his followers. But can you think of a situation where the master did this very thing? Read John 13:3-7. Do you see the similarities. Here in John 13 Jesus actually did the work of a servant- He washed his disciples feet! He came to serve! His disciples sat at the table while the master ministered to them! Such is the amazing love of Jesus Christ! He serves those whom He has saved! And added to this- this very same Jesus will say to His faithful disciples on the last day- well done, good and faithful servants! From Matthew 25- well done! Enter into the joy of your master! So both things are true! The servant views himself and his work with humility- not expecting or earning any praise. And also on the last day- these faithful servants will hear the praise of Jesus and receive a reward from their master! Such is the grace that we receive! Not earning a reward- but receiving one none the less!

To conclude, God’s grace is so much better than we often admit! The fact is, God’s people are not worthy of the work they do, nor of any reward for that labor! The calling we receive and the ability to do it remains a gift of grace! Having been created and redeemed by our God- it is our solemn duty to obey. Jesus Christ reveals our complete dependance on God for our salvation even as we are called to work as servants in His household. So may we all faithfully perform our duty- in humility doing the task set before us each day. For you are not your own- you were bought at a price.