

Luke 17: 7-10; Mt. 25:14-21; Unworthy Servants I. The Servant's Work II. The Servant's Attitude III. The Master's Surprise

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, pride and laziness are common marks of our time. These are symptoms of the spirit of entitlement. When we think we deserve better- it is hard to be motivated to work hard and to do a good job. We can even see this in our children, sometimes. When we ask them to clean their room, they may ask- what's in it for me? Well, in this context of entitlement comes our teaching on responsibility- doing what is expected of you. This short story told by Jesus focusses on the action and attitude of a servant. What are the expectations placed on a bondservant in God's household? So today we see that Jesus reveals the responsibilities of a servant in the household of God.

I. The Servant's Work

In our text starting in v. 7, Jesus begins by outlining the consistent and constant work expected of a servant. If you have a slave, what do you expect him to do? Now the word "slave" or "servant" is a charged word today- but keep in mind that indentured servants were common in that day. The servant- in Greek is called a "doulos" meaning anyone who is devoted to the service of another. The servant belongs to his master- having been purchased. In this context, the servant is a metaphor for us- we are servants- slaves of our God. We have been purchased and we belong within his household. And since we belong to Him, we are not our own. Being purchased means that we have work to do- and that we are not free to follow our own agendas and plans. Rather, as v. 7 begins- the servant has been sent outside- early in the morning he goes to work either plowing or tending sheep. He works hard with his hands- doing his manual labor from sun up to sun down. But when the sun goes down, this servant returns to his home ready to continue his work. The outside work transitions into inside work- as v. 8 continues- he will now be called upon to prepare and serve the meal. His work is not done until all tasks have been finished. In fact- as v. 10 puts it- a servant is one who does all that he is commanded to do. Being servants of our God, we are called upon to do all that He commands. And as I said before, this work is consistent and constant. At no time can we say- I am taking a

break from the Christian life. There is no day- no hour over which Christ does not say- your time belongs to me! The fact is, belonging to a family comes with responsibilities! Take for example these young families in front of you. Would a father or mother say- I have done enough work with my child this week- now I am off the clock? If the child is crying in the night- does the parent not get up and continue their work! The work of a parent is 24-7. So it is with the servant of Christ! What you do at your job during the day- and what you do in the home at night- are all part of this servant identity we have! There no compartmentalizing- every hour of every day falls under the scope of serving and obeying. Parenting is more than a full-time job- it is a life calling. So a Christian's life is a calling-Christ's demand upon your time covers every aspect! To say this another way- there is not one moment- not one second of your life over which Christ does not say- mine! You are His servant- and He has the rights of total ownership- since He purchased you with His precious blood! You are not your own, you were bought with a price as I Cor. 6 says- so glorify God with your body! We do not deserve to be adopted into God's house- but now that we are- our obedience is expected even demanded.

II. The Servant's Attitude

Now that we understand the scope of the servant's work- in our next point we look at the attitude of this servant. What should motivate us- and what should we expect from the Mather of the House? Should we work in order to gain- or should we expect praise from our master when we do what is expected of us? In v. 9 Jesus says- the servant should not expect thanks from the master for doing what was commanded him. To illustrate this point- imagine a parent telling their child to perform some task. Does the child have the right to choose to obey or not to obey? And when they do obey, should they expect to be praised and rewarded for doing what was commanded? Not if they are a part of the family- and not if obedience is commanded by God! In a similar way, the service and obedience that we give our God is expected. Since we have been ransomed- since we are His possessions- He has the right to command- to tell us what we should do and how we should live. Obedience for us is not a question or an option- but expected and even demanded. And in

our obedience, we are not seeking to gain God's favor- much less to pay God back for what we have received. Rather we should have the attitude of a servant whose obedience is natural- even a necessary response. In v. 10 the servant says- we are unworthy servants. The word- unworthy- is "achorios"- meaning unworthy and unmerited. Entrance into the Kingdom of heaven- being welcomed into the household of God- is not something that we can merit or earn. We remain unworthy and our works unmeritorious. You do not and cannot deserve His grace. Your calling and election are not earned- a position in His house is not a reward for hard work. Added to this fact, we remain unprofitable. God gives much more than He receives- in fact what can God receive from us? We take much more than we give! How can our work in any way be a payment to God- He is not served with human hands as if He needs something from us as Acts 17 puts it. What can we really and truly give God? Our worship? Well He deserves that! Our money? That's His too! What can we render to God- how could our obedience be a payment to Him? And consider this- what do we have that we have not first received from Him? All our talents and time are gifts from Him- so even perfect obedience would be simply giving God the worship that He deserves! So the first attitude of a servant is humility! We know our place- we see our unworthiness- and we know that reception into this house is of mercy and grace alone! Jesus encourages us to look at our salvation from God's perspective. He made us and He redeemed us! Your citizenship in His Kingdom is freely bestowed on you! It is only natural and fitting that this change in status be followed by a change in life. As v. 10 continues, unworthy servants perform their duty. This "duty" is what is expected of us. The work of a debtor- doing what He ought to do because of their status. God owes us nothing- we owe Him everything- our all! This calls for humble obedience! Receiving a gift does not make us lazy- or uncaring! For example, those who have received the Covenant are motivated by gratitude and thanksgiving! As we teach our children about the blessings God has given to us and them- how can we help but be thankful and respond with praise and obedience? We teach them about who they are as God's children- which leads to discussion about proper living! The fact that we are welcomed in our families does not undermine our calling- no- rather our identity is what motivates us towards acts of love and service!

Who we are directs how we live! We are blessed and loved servants of our God and Father! Think of what we read in Mt. 25- the master gives talents to his servants- entrusting them with His property. The master has reasonable expectation placed upon his servants- use my talents for good. This is the only reasonable action when a servant gets to use the master's gifts. But note what the servant says when the master returns- here is your talent back- with no expectation of praise or reward- the servant was faithful with what was entrusted to Him! No one- upon arriving at the gates of pearl- should think of saying- I deserve this! Or worse, I expected something better because I worked harder! No- we work- we obey because it is our expected duty- we have been created in Christ Jesus to do good works, as God prepared in advance for us to do as Eph. 2 says. But consider also that being in God's house is a good thing! It is a privilege to be here! Unlike the stigma on the word- slave- we as Christian want to be a slave or bondservant of Christ! Because our master is gentle, His burden easy and His yoke light! So although our work is a duty- a necessity- that does not mean it cannot be done with joy! We can and should delight in our duty- and rejoice in our task! Because the one we serve is a gracious and loving- even rewarding master! Doing what we are called to do- but with a smile on our face- because we know our master's surprise!

III. The Master's Surprise

In our last point, we consider our master's surprise. Although the servant should not expect- or seek to merit a reward- the fact remains that our master's plan are unlike any earthly arrangement. As odd- even impossible it would be for an earthly master to serve his servants, we find this very thing in Jesus life! It is not that the Master is Surprised- but that the Master surprise us with His love! Although being the master of the house, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. He came not to be served, but to serve as Mt. 20 says. Although worthy of our unquestioned allegiance and service, Jesus often turns the tables and reverses the roles. Take for example the next passage in Luke 17- Jesus- the master of the house- heals the sick and serves the needy. Without going into detail- we also note that the reasonable expectation of a joyful obedience and a return to give thanks to the healer is only evident in one of the men healed! Think also of

the moving passage in John 13- lets read John 13:3-16! Note how Jesus reverses the roles- the master gets up and serves the servants- washing the feet of His followers! First Jesus meets our needs- and He gives us the cleansing that we require! Because we are unable to wash, cleanse and save ourselves- Jesus does for us what we cannot do! He perfectly served as the chief servant of mankind- and by His work He has secured our entrance into His Father's house as well! He meets our needs first- enabling us to become members of His house- where now as our text is explaining- we are called to trust and obey by faith! We are surprised by the Master's love for us! As we read in Mt. 25 earlier- the master will say- well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master! Although a reward is not expected and earned- it is also true that a reward is promised and will be provided! We remain unprofitable servants doing our duty- however, we will be further blessed with a promised reward! He will seat us at His table- and dine with us at the wedding supper of the Lamb- welcoming us into the joy and blessings of our forever heavenly home! A reward will be received- but not here and now- rather in the life to come!

To conclude, as our catechism states- good works are those that are done to God's glory, proceeding from a heart of faith and are done in accordance with His Will. These works do not earn or merit anything from God- but a reward is promised- and yet even this reward is a gift of grace. We do good works to show that we are thankful to God for His benefits. Good works then- joyfully obeying God's commandments because that is our duty- can only be found in the context of our new identity. Jesus reveals the responsibilities of a servant in the household of God. Since we already belong to Christ as members of God's house- our works become a necessary, joyful and thankful response!