

**The Wisdom of Christ**  
**Parable of the Obedient Servant**  
**Bible Study 8 - Luke 17:7-10**

**Goals:**

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

**Expectations:**

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

**Note:**

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

**Suggested Homework:**

- 1) Print out these studies or have a way of filling them out and accessing them on your phone.
- 2) Read Luke 17:7-10 before completing this study. When you finish the study, reread the passage again.
- 3) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 4) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.
- 5) Read the parable three times this week. As you read through it, connect it to your experience of God's grace and seek to focus on that this week.
- 6) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.

**Introduction:**

**DISCUSS:** Share one blessing God has given you this week.

**DISCUSS:** What are some things in your life you would be willing to sacrifice for?

**DISCUSS:** What makes something worthy of sacrifice?

**Review:**

Background for Luke: The original reader- Written to Theophilus, a patron who wanted to know more of Jesus Christ. Luke compiled Luke and Acts as the answer to how the Church got started and who Jesus was.

Purpose: **Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, who came to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man's sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, Son of *Man* focuses on the unique ONE of mankind who ultimately fulfills God's purpose of being the visible representative of the invisible God and in the process redeems the rest of humanity. There is only one OF US who has fulfilled God's plan. There is only one OF US who redeems us. And those who by faith express their solidarity with the SON OF MAN will also be redeemed to fulfill God's purpose for humanity. Luke contains a distinctive approach to humanity in the book (as noted below), and consequently an emphasis on Christ's humanity as the human Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.**

Luke shows particular attention on the oppressed, unfavored and gentile recipients of Jesus' ministry, such as Samaritans, women, Romans, gentiles, children, tax collectors and other non-religious elites. Luke wanted to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save all.

Luke 9-19 has been recognized as a great chiasmic artistic/poetic masterpiece. Known by many names, this account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem is laden with brilliant poetry and magnificent composition of the parables and anecdotes within. Parables from this passage will be the central focus of this study.

**Review Questions:**

- 1) Summarize the main point of Luke's gospel in your own words.
- 2) Describe the person Luke is trying to teach.
- 3) What was one truth from last week's parable that you had the opportunity to apply this week? Did you take advantage of that opportunity?

**Text: Luke 17:7-10 NASB**

7 “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’?

8 “But will he not say to him,

‘Prepare something for me to eat,  
and *properly* clothe yourself and serve me  
while I eat and drink;  
and afterward you may eat and drink’?

9 “He does not thank the slave  
because he did the things which were commanded, does he?

10 “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.’”

Note: Italicized words indicate a supplied word by the translators to clarify the concepts of the text.

**Summary Form:**

Section A:

Slave

Fulfilling Orders

Orders Fulfilled

Reward?

Section B:

Serve the Master

Then yourself

Section A':

Slave

Fulfilling Orders

Orders Fulfilled

Reward?

**Literary Background**

In this parable we see both an inverted parallelism and step parallelism. Below are the appropriate sections from the first study as a reminder.

**Step parallelism**

The step parallelism is designed to show relation similarly to the standard parallelism. Usually, there are repeated words, and the same progression of thought. It draws our focus to see how the two

phrases or sets are different and similar. In summary, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

My silly example:

A     The one *drinking Coke* will be *happy*,  
B       and he will also be *full of joy*.

A     I *drink Coke* and feel *happy* inside,  
B       and within my heart my *joy* is *full*.

Here, we see common words used and a similar progression. The author then may be seeking to draw attention to this particular progression. In addition, the change from speaking about anyone who drinks Coke to personal experience further shows another facet to the truth of the material. Remember, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

### **Inverted Parallelism**

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen below in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

My silly example of an inverted parallelism

A     I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*  
B       Their *chocolate chips* are delicious  
C       My tummy is filled with *warmth* when  
D       I think of my mom and the times she made them for me  
C'     I am *warmed* by the memories as  
B'     The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth  
A'     and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

**QUESTION:** Where do you see these literary devices in the parable (draw arrows/add notes to the text)?  
What is significant about the usage of these devices?

**Cultural background:**

**--Please highlight two sentences in this section you found particularly interesting or that helped your understanding of the parable.**

**Role of a Servant:**

Having lived in a country where slavery is a concept rife with the injustices of racism and the employer is obligated to meet many standards of compensation for each worker, it is difficult to envision the backdrop of this parable. Many Americans shudder at the moral of this parable of Christ because it involves in our minds a violation of normal human rights, both in terms of a slave and a worker. However, before assuming any wrongdoing, I believe it is important to set the stage and see what the original reader would have understood about Jesus' teaching.

The first consideration is that of the life of a Middle Eastern peasant was one with little to no financial insulation. The average peasant did not have a 401k. His long term investments were not accruing interest, for he had none. No college fund, no savings account, no third car. His retirement plan was that his children would find a way to make ends meet and care for him when he was too old to provide for them. He likely owned no property, likely had no great possessions. Survival was of first priority to this man. Usually the *best* way to make money and preserve your family was to offer your service to a wealthier landowner or land tenant (such as one of the tenants in the Parable of the Dishonest Steward). Now this process of becoming a bond-servant or slave was much different from American slavery and also much different from the work culture in place today.

Imagine being connected to another person or group so much so that your gain or decline was based upon their standing. In our individualistic culture, this thought is quite foreign to our mindsets, yet was commonplace among first century Israelites. The view of one's community was that each was a part of the greater village or town in which they lived and an inseparable part of it. If it declined, they fared poorly. We live in a society where if the economy or school system goes bottom up in your town, you simply move to greener pastures. If you don't like your job, you quit. This was not the thought of a Middle Easterner.

When the bond-servant or slave would attach himself or herself to the master, he or she was joining their gain or failure with the gain or failure of the master. As destructive as this dependant relationship seemed to be for the fate of the slave, the reverse is actually true. Recognized and honored almost as a member of the family, the slave had a deep connection and tie with his master and therefore, was recognized more often and more personally understood the benefits of his or her labors. The harder he or she worked, the more gain was enjoyed by the master. The more gain the master experienced, the more gain the servant experienced and the more secure and important he felt. He could see his efforts resulting in the benefit for the estate to which he was tied and gained for this family who was also tying themselves to him. In addition to payment, the standing of this slave in the community and the house of the master was a great benefit to the slave. He was afforded protection and care by his master, and was seldom taken advantage of. **Truly, in this system, it is the slave that usually benefits more than the master from their relationship.**

### Thank the slave:

**With this concept of the servant in mind, please read the parable again.**

How does this idea that the servant is already being well treated and getting the better end of the bargain affect what you see in the parable? I hope it gives the notion that because the master has given so much to the servant, it would be dishonorable and selfish for the servant not to render so excellent a service. The master is actually caring for the servant better than our employers today! There is no benefits package, but the master will care for the ill servant himself. When things turn poorly for our contemporary worker, they are no longer bound to their employer and their employer is not obligated to provide anything for them. The servant of this parable is actually extremely well cared for.

Naturally, the slave's response would be exactly what we see in the parable. The slave goes about his or her daily tasks, and when finished, understands that just like the master is their caretaker and obligated to them always, they are the slave and obligated to the master always. They do not deserve a party or to be pampered when they return from the fields, but cater to the needs and desires of the master. They are, after all, the slaves. The master is the master.

In the rendering of "thank" in verse 9, it is difficult to capture what is being expressed. It certainly does not imply that the master never thanks the slave or that the slave's efforts deserve no appreciation. What is being expressed is the lack of any *special* recognition from the master for toiling in the field, then returning to serve the master. **He will not gain special thanks or over the top praise because he has done what he was commissioned to do.**

There is a bit of hyperbole even in Jesus telling of what the master would not do. The master doesn't run out and beg the servant, "come in, you must be so tired! Here, I've prepared the best chair next the fireplace and brought an ottoman so you can put your feet up. Oh, no! They're so dirty; here, let me give you a pedicure. Sit down and eat while I perform dinner theatre." Jesus presents a laughable situation in asking if the master will say "come immediately and sit and eat."

### Conclusion:

This parable has many implications for the believer. First, we are God's slaves. We are forever indebted to him for his act of grace and mercy in the death of Jesus Christ. He has provided us a place near God and is preparing us a place in heaven and has blessed us with the Holy Spirit and opportunities to serve him. Just like the master of the Middle Eastern villages, our Master pays a great price to show us kindness and to care for us, to include us in his Kingdom and make us his servants. We truly do not deserve the benefits provided and could not ever serve enough to deserve it.

Secondly, what God has spent and given should motivate us to view ourselves always as his slaves. Our attitude should be the same as the slave in verse 8. We serve the Master first, we think of the Master first. We should always say when thinking of rewards is the slave's sentiment expressed in verse 10. **"We are unworthy slaves." We are not entitled to great rewards, parties or fanfare. "We have only done what we ought to do."**

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) **DISCUSS:** What is the main point of this parable? How does it relate to the greater context of the book of Luke?
- 2) **DISCUSS:** How did Jesus provide an example of this attitude in his servanthood?

- 3) **DISCUSS:** It was mentioned that the slave benefitted more from the master/slave relationship than the master. Does this apply to our relationship with God? If so, how? If not, why not?
  
- 4) **DISCUSS:** Romans 12:1-2 describe our “reasonable service/act of worship.” Is there something from that passage that can help us apply the mindset of the faithful and obedient servant of this parable?
  
- 5) **DISCUSS:** What is one step you can take toward this kind of thinking and view of self?

**ANSWERS: (spoiler alert)**

- 1) Answers may vary. Example: the main point of this parable could be summed up that a slave/servant does what he does not to gain something, but he acts because he already has that something. This is a great picture of our Savior as he endured the cross for the joy that was set before him.
- 2) Answers will vary. Example: Jesus humbled/emptied himself (Philippians 2) in his entering humanity, living a sinless life and dying at the hands of his own creation because he was a slave of the Father's will, just as we saw in his prayer in Gethsemane.
- 3) Answers will vary. Enjoy the discussion here and discuss how God has lost much in reaching out to us, but also how he appoints us as representatives and makes us his vessels of grace, love and the Gospel.
- 4) Answers will vary. My goal here is go connect the act of sacrificing our will, our rights and our sinful, selfish mindsets on the altar of service to our great God, but his conversation can go in many helpful directions.
- 5) Answers will vary.