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Good and Faithful Servants

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Good and Faithful Servants

Little Tommy Franklin was his parents' pride and joy. At the ripe old age of six, he was half-toddler, half-adult. His parents, intent on training him correctly, were constantly teaching him to serve others. He would help with the cooking, help with the dishes, help pour the water, and help clean the house. If a neighbor needed something, Tommy was trained to get what they needed and take it to them. He was the joy of the neighborhood, and though you sometimes didn't know what he was thinking, it was usually a plan to help somebody else.

This Sunday afternoon was no exception. The Franklins had a tradition of cooking on the outdoor grill on Sunday afternoons, whenever the weather permitted. They would pick a neighbor they hadn't seen for a while, invite them for a late lunch after church, and cook hamburgers or, on rare occasions, steaks, on the barbecue pit. Needless to say, Tommy always did his part to help. This Sunday, however, Tommy was more pensive than usual. He wanted to fix the meat, all by himself. He wouldn't elaborate, but he just kept saying, *"I want to be a servant like Jesus..."*

It's hard to argue with that kind of plea, so the Franklin clan gladly turned the grill over to their eager six-year-old. This was a special day, because their new pastor had moved into the area, and Dad had bought the nicest steaks he could find in honor of the occasion. The two families settled into the den and began relaxing, but it wasn't long before they smelled something burning. Dad Franklin raced to the yard, but Tommy shoved him back inside, assuring him everything was perfect.

In about 10 minutes Tommy entered the house beaming from ear to ear. His parents were by now a bit apprehensive at the odor coming from the backyard. It smelled like burning rubber. Nevertheless, they said nothing, and waited for the delicious meat to arrive, a la Thomas.

Arrive it did. As Tommy entered the house, all smiles, the smiles on the Franklins' faces faded a bit. For on the platter was about \$60 worth of meat cooked so well done it looked like it had been meant to be a burnt offering, rather than an edible meal. Tommy could contain himself no longer.

"This is a Jesus meal!" he shouted with glee. "I fixed a Jesus

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meal.” The pastor and his family gulped, thinking that if the lad thought Jesus was for it, they were going to have to eat it. “What do you mean, a Jesus meal?”, Dad quietly asked, trying to contain his thoughts of fleeing dollar signs.

“We studied about it in Sunday School today,” Tommy asserted. “When they asked Jesus how to fix the meal, he answered, “Well done, my good and faithful servants, well done.”

Tommy’s class had been studying about servanthood that morning. They had talked about the parable in Luke 17, where Jesus said, “Would he not rather say, “Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me...” The class had ended with a look at Luke 19, the parable of the faithful servants, where the master had said, “Well done, thou good and faithful servants.” Somehow, Tommy’s mind half-fixed on lunch, and half on the lesson, got the words, but missed the message.

We do that, too. We quote those words over and over without really understanding what they mean. The Franklins’ pastor and his family, incidentally, rather than offend the lad, ate the burnt offerings. It gave a new meaning to the term, “well done”. But they never forgot it, because every time after that when they said something was “well done”, they thought of what Jesus *really* meant.

What Jesus really meant when He said, “well done” is what we will be looking at in this study. It is a continuation of our look at the issue of servanthood or slavery, using Philippians, chapter two, as our backdrop. Jesus has told us to “let this mind be in us.” This is to be our mindset: the mindset Jesus had when He laid aside His robes of righteousness, gave us the right to His name, and came to earth as a man. “And being found in fashion as a man,” He humbled Himself even further, the Scripture records, and became a “doulos”, a bondsman of the Father. Whatever the Father wanted, He did. Wherever the Father sent Him, He went. Whoever the Father sent for Him to serve, He served. Serving, in fact, was the primary task His Master, Jehovah, had sent Him to perform; and the ones He was to serve were the very ones who rejected Him, ridiculed Him, denied Him, and ultimately crucified Him.

And “this mind is to be in us.” It is quite a radical departure from the mindset of man. The mind of man sees servanthood as demeaning, sees doing another’s will as weak, and sees giving yourself to those who hate you as ridiculous. The concept of God

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humbling Himself and dying for His enemies is a stumblingblock to the unbeliever. His asking us to do the same is unthinkable.

Until you and I come to grips with the concept, however, the world will never understand why Jesus said it. He gave us those seemingly impossible commandments to love one another, especially our enemies, so that a lost and dying world could experience a quality of life that only can come from having God indwell man. That's why this "mind of Christ" must increasingly be ours.

In our last study, we looked at three aspects of being a slave.

1- A slave does whatever he is told.

2- A slave ministers to whoever his master sends his way.

3- A slave must not be at odds with the master's other slaves.

In this lesson, we pursue the next aspect of the life of a slave, how he goes about serving those his master sends him to serve. There are several passages that beckon to us, and we will be looking at two of them in this study, living illustrations of servanthood from the Scriptures.

THE PERIL OF PROCRASTINATION...

One of the problems we have as slaves of God manifests itself in a most predictable way. Because our Master, the Lord Jesus, is not visibly present with us, our duties as servants must be done by faith. We cannot see the rewards that await us, and the punishment that accompanies disobedience is oftentimes slow in coming, because our Lord is "slow to anger, patient, and merciful."

Rewards are healthy things to motivate people. Athletes punish their bodies unmercifully for years to prepare for the Olympics games. Finally, the moment comes. Everything they have worked for, trained for, and prepared for, comes down to this brief point in time. The reward is a trophy, and the recognition that comes to them and their country for a job well done. Children in school labor for rewards; salesmen work extra time in contests, because a reward awaits them. But, suppose these rewards were invisible and intangible. Suppose at the end of the Olympics, all of the athletes were told, "Someday, I can't tell you when, but someday, a trophy awaits you for what you have done." Would that not be a more difficult kind of motivation? They would leave there with nothing but a promise. The next time they might, if they are not careful, be less motivated to do their best, because what if that recognition never came?

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Slaves in Jesus' day often did not get immediate recognition. Their masters were not usually around to watch their every move. The masters would, however, often arrive at the most unexpected times, and if the slave was being slothful or rebellious he would break his master's heart and lose his master's trust and any rewards his master had in store.

Jesus needed to imprint a message on the hearts of His disciples. He was going away to be with the Father, and He was sending His Spirit to indwell all those who trusted Him with their lives. He would no longer be there to tell them they were doing well. It would now be a ministry of faith. They would have to labor, not for immediate recognition, but for future rewards. They had no idea when the Master would return; therefore, they needed to live every single hour of every single day as though He would be coming immediately. That way they would never be embarrassed or disappoint their Master.

It was this backdrop that Jesus was using as He painted a vivid picture in Matthew, chapter 24, of how you and I are to labor as servants of the Most High God. The setting finds Jesus talking about His return. He tells them:

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call., and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree. As soon as the twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.

(Matthew 24:30-32 NIV)

Then Jesus gives this parable:

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this, if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.

(Matthew 24:42 NIV)

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant if his master finds him doing so when he returns.

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I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, My master is staying away a long time,

and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of,

He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

(Matthew 24:45-51 NIV)

What a sobering reminder to all of us that parable ought to be. Jesus begins by calling attention to the most momentous occasion yet to happen to fallen man, the return of Jesus Christ. And He reminds us of three things:

- 1- When certain things come to pass, we can know that His return is getting ever so close.
- 2- We will never know exactly when that moment will be.
- 3- We ought, then, to live as though it will be in the next 60 minutes.

To reinforce the latter point, Jesus uses two illustrations: one about a thief who comes in the night, and one about a servant who gets slothful, because he does not know for sure when his master will return. Both have the same point; we are to always be ready. If we knew exactly when we were going to be robbed we wouldn't have a problem. We wouldn't need a security system. We need not lock the house, except for that night. On that night, we'd call the police, prepare for the worst, and be ready for the unsuspecting thief.

But we don't know. So we have to live every day as though someone might try to break in. We lock the doors. We lock the windows. We stay on guard at all times. His second story is even more vivid. He uses the analogy of a slave who has been assigned the task by his master of taking care of the master's other slaves.

For a while, he is pretty faithful. But before long, he thinks to himself, "I haven't seen the master of the house for days now. What if he's delayed for a long time. I'll be wasting my time being faithful. Maybe he's not coming back at all. Why be faithful when no one's looking?" Two things naturally follow.

1- He begins to take lightly the needs of the other servants. He begins to treat them with disrespect, finally with cruelty. He sees

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no need to honor them apart from how it will make the master feel, and who knows when the master will return?

2- He begins to let his moral standards slip. He starts to run with the wrong crowd, and soon he is doing what they do.

So, believing that the master may not return soon, he stops serving, and he stops being holy. “Why waste my time being obedient when the master’s not watching?” he surmises.

You know, of course, what happens. At the precise moment he is beating the other servants in a drunken rage, he hears a voice behind him, “Is that you, Demetrius?” the master whispers. “I didn’t hear you coming, Lord,” he replies. “No, I see you didn’t,” the master answers. “You will be beaten within an inch of your life. I trusted you. I gave you a job to do. I told you I’d be back.”

I know what you’re thinking. “He deserved that. What a rotten guy. How could he take the master’s responsibilities so lightly? Think of all the master had done for him. He trusted him. He ought to be horse-whipped.”

Careful, Beloved. Before you pass judgment, be sure you understand the issues. This was a hypothetical story. Jesus was using this story to get our attention. He wanted to remind us of the perils of presumption and procrastination. He wanted to help us see just what faithless fools we are.

It has a special message for Christian leaders, but it has a deep message for all of us. Our Lord has redeemed us. He bought us on the slave block of sin, purchased us with His own blood, and gave us a series of important assignments to take care of while He went back to Heaven to prepare a place for us. We were to take care of the rest of the flock. We were to treat each believer’s needs as more important than our own. So, for a little while, we were faithful. We told everyone we met how wonderful our Master is. We wouldn’t let the slightest thing go undone that He had given us to do. After all, He is the Master! And oh, what great things He has done for us. He trusts us to carry on His work. He says He’s coming back, and when He does, He’ll reward us for all the things we’ve done.

But time passed by and we didn’t see a lot of tangible evidences that He was either blessing our work or punishing our negligence. So, little by little, we began to look around us and wonder, “Can’t I have the best of both worlds? I’ll live in my Master’s house, let the Master protect me from evil, proudly bear the Master’s name when

it is to my benefit to do so, but why not enjoy the flesh a little? I'll just let some of my duties as His slave slip by. I've done it before, and nothing's happened. Any why not stop loving some of those infernal fellow-servants who are always taking from me, but never giving back? After all, who am I? My brother's keeper?

“Besides, those standards of morality and holiness the Master insists on are just too strict. Look at all the Christian leaders who are pretending to be spiritual, while living it up. Think I'll fellowship with some of my unsaved friends for a while and enjoy some of the benefits of worldliness. The Lord's coming back? Sure He is. Maybe that's just an analogy. Maybe He's not really coming back. And if He does, I'll probably hear Him coming up the road. I'll recognize the signs. Then I can repent, and be right on target when He arrives.”

What if the next sound you heard was the sound of a trumpet? Not a musical presentation, a divine intervention in history. What if, suddenly, the archangel shouted, and you were instantly transported into the very presence of God Himself. No warning. He gave you all the warning you needed when He went back to the Father.

Or what if He just called you home this afternoon? What if there wasn't time to repent, or you were so steeped in sin by that time, you didn't even recognize the need to repent? And as you were ushered into the presence of the Master, you noticed tears in His eyes. “Why are you crying, Master?” you ask. “I am weeping over the way you treated my other servants,” he replies, “and I am weeping over the way you made light of My holiness. I trusted you. I gave my life for you.”

“But, Lord,” you answer, “I didn't expect to see you so soon.” No doubt he would answer you, “I can see that, but, oh, my child, I told you I'd be back, and I always keep my word. That should have been enough.”

The Peril of Procrastination

It assumes that:

1- The Master may not come back after all, so there might not be a time of judgment or a time of rewards.

2- If He does return, there will be enough signs that will tip us off, that we will be able to change our ways and get ready.

So we let little compromises slip into our lives that we know, if

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He were here, we would not tolerate. And little by little, we begin to live as though this life is all there is to live for. Sometimes we even begin to become more religious or more “spiritually active”, thinking that if He should return, He would be so impressed with our standing in the church, He would have to overlook those secret sins.

The problem that accompanies those assumptions is simple. It simply says, “God is a liar.” It implies that when He said, “I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again...”, He didn’t really mean it. And it assumes that when He said, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of God to reveal the things done in this life,” He was wither joking or lying.

It assumes that this parable is a myth, that Jesus never meant that the Father would judge us for not being faithful in His absence, for not living every day as though that were the day of His blessed return.

Faithful servants live as though the Master were coming up the walkway now. They want their house in order. They want their assignments done. They want the other servants He sent them to serve to be expecting His return as well. He wants no dissension or strife in the family when He arrives. Too much is at stake. We live like little children whose parents have gone away for the week. We are so sure they won’t come back early that we wait until the last minute to clean the house, tend to the yard, and wash the car. We assume that we can do all of that just before they drive up the driveway. But it never fails. They “surprise” every one by coming a day early. What a mess. What disappointed parents. What undisciplined sons and daughters.

You and I have even less of an excuse than they do. Our Father never really left us. He sent His Spirit to indwell us, and so in a real sense, He is right here, watching our rebellion, seeing our impure thoughts, listening to our divisive words. And yet, we live as though He were nowhere around! What fools we are.

The peril of procrastination, then, has ruined our lives. It has given us a false picture of how God views His children while they await His return. We’ve got to do something about it today. He is coming back. At any moment, He’ll return. And even if we try to “clean up” the messes we’ve made before He comes, it won’t matter. The Holy Spirit has been here all along, taking notes, weeping over our hypocrisy and our arrogance.

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We don't know when the thief will arrive, so we must always be on guard. And we don't know when the Master of the house will return, so we must be ready at any time.

The Promise of Rewards...

There is yet a second reason we must be ready for his return. It is the positive side of the coin. When He does come, He is coming to reward us for whatever we have done in the Spirit. It is that principle He was enunciating in Matthew, chapter 25. He began with the parable of the ten bridesmaids. Five of them were ready when the Master came for the wedding. Five, however, had been foolish, and had presumed on the bridegroom by falling asleep. Then He amplifies that truth with another parable.

Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.

To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.

So also the one with the two talents gained two more.

But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.

The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

The man with the two talents also came. "Master," he said, "you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more."

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Then the man who had received the one talent came. "Master," he said, "I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground.

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See, here is what belongs to you.”

His master replied, “You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed?

Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

(Matthew 25:14-30 NIV)

“Well done, my good and faithful servant.” What a wonderful scene to look forward to. Some golden daybreak, the Master will return. He will come personally. He will come powerfully. He will come perfectly. But He will come. And when He does, there will be more involved than just the rebuke of those who have been procrastinating. There will be a rewards ceremony, the likes of which man has never even imagined. It is called the “Bema Seat of Christ;” and we will be given rewards for the things we have allowed Christ to do in us and through us.

The issue isn’t how talented we are. The issue isn’t how effective we are in ministering. The issue is: “What have we done with the life God has given us?” Have we invested it in people? Have we unselfishly served those around us with no real thought for our own welfare? Or have we calculated each act of generosity to be sure we were not inconvenienced by others’ needs?

Jesus gave the same commendation to the two-talent man as He did to the five-talent man: “Well done.” Each was called a “good” and “faithful” *doulos*. Because of their fame? No, because of their faithfulness. Day after day they took what they had and invested it in eternity, and when approached, they had treasures laid up in Heaven “where moth and rust cannot corrupt and where thieves cannot break through and steal.”

A good slave doesn’t do the minimum he can get by with, so he can get on with his own pursuits when the master isn’t looking. A good slave gives his very life to pleasing his master. He doesn’t always get the master’s approval day by day. But he knows that

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one day, the master will return, because he said he would. On that day, he will either be rewarded for his faithfulness or rebuked for his slothfulness. And nothing he does from then on will change the outcome. Today the Master is reminding you that He is coming back. He is reminding us not to be insensitive or cruel to the other servants, and not to let our appetites give way to the desires of the flesh.

At an hour we know not, He is coming. When we least expect Him, He is coming; without warning, He is coming. If we are going through the motions of being spiritual on the outside, but living a lie on the inside, He wants us to know He is coming soon.

Those who are procrastinating, had better get on with it. There isn't any time to waste. And those who are not investing their lives in things spiritual, had better get on with it. The Bema Seat is just around the corner.

The Master will be there. You will be there. And He will speak. What will He say? By His grace, may He be able to say:

WELL DONE!

Well done, thou good and faithful one,
You have labored on;
Year after year, you have patiently toiled
Till all your strength was gone.

You invested your life in people
You gave up your claim to fame;
Things eternal were foremost to you
Your only concern, My Name.

Now you are home, Beloved,
All of your journey is done.
You gave your life to serving Me
And honoring My Son.

Well done, thou good and faithful one,
Thou hast stood the test.
Enter into My heart of hearts;
Enter in...and rest.

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