

July 28, 2013

Parables: Service

By Bryan Hodge

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28).

“I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I awoke and saw life is all service. I served and I saw service is joy.” ~ Khalil Gibran

“The high destiny of the individual is to serve rather than to rule...” ~Albert Einstein

Let us consider two parables that we will classify as “service” parables. Let us notice...

The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37)

The setting (10:25-29): A lawyer asked Jesus, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” The question may have not been sincere for it says that he did this to test him. Jesus answered the question by saying that the requirements may be summed up in two points: (1) Love God; (2) Love your neighbor (your fellow-man). Keep in mind that man demonstrates his love for God by keeping His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 2:4; 5:3), and one demonstrates his love for man by keeping the commandments (Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 5:2; 2 John 5-6).

The lawyer then replied, “Who is my neighbor?” Does this include non-Israelites?

The Parable (10:30-37): A traveling man is in trouble. He has been robbed. The robbers took even his clothes. He was wounded. His wounds are serious. He is “half-dead”.

A priest traveling that same road comes upon him, sees him, but passes without helping. Next, a Levite comes, looks, but he too passes on without helping. Perhaps, they were in a hurry. Perhaps they did not want to get involved, or even feared getting involved. Perhaps, they didn’t want to risk getting blood on their garments. Why they passed by, we are not told. We are only told that they did pass.

Finally, a Samaritan stops. He treats the man’s wounds. He transports him to an inn and cares for him that day. The next day, he departs, first instructing the innkeeper, “take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again I will repay you.”

Jesus asks, “Which of the three was a neighbor?” The lawyer answered, “he who showed mercy.” Jesus instructs, “Go and do likewise.”

The application: (1) The idea of love and responsibility should not be limited to nationality or ethnicity. (2) We should show compassion to those in need.

Consider the following passages – Hosea 6:6, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Micah 6:8, “He has shown you, O man what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Matthew 25:40, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me."
James 2:13, "Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgments."

One last point, Margaret Thatcher once said, "No one would have remembered the Good Samaritan if he hadn't any money (Dave Ramsey, Total Money Makeover, p. 13). While this may not be entirely true, it is true that money can be used to show kindness (1 Timothy 6:17-19). Money itself is not evil. It is a tool with which one can do great good.

The Unprofitable Servant (Luke 17:7-10)

The setting (17:7-10): The audience is the apostles. Jesus has told them that if they had faith as a mustard seed they could do great things. T. Pierce Brown has written, "It is my judgment that most commentaries do not do justice to the lesson Jesus is trying to teach. The ones I remember say something like this 'The grain of mustard seed is small. If you just had a small amount of faith, you could do great things'... Jesus already admits that they had a little faith (Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 17:20)... It is not the size of the faith that he is emphasizing, but the nature or quality of the faith... Now how big is a grain of mustard seed? Well, it is small, but that is not the important point... The important thing is that the mustard seed does have power to appropriate God's gifts... The point is... They needed on active operative faith. If a grain of mustard seed is dead, it does not matter whether it is small or large, it will produce nothing. But if a grain of mustard seed is alive, active, and appropriating the gifts of rain, sunshine and earth it will produce greatly. So it is with our faith." (Article: How Much Faith Do You Need?, see Dec. 3, 2006 bulletin). If their faith were alive, then they would grow and accomplish great things.

The Parable (17:7-10): It is easy for us to think that we've done something great when we serve God and do good to our fellow man. It is easy to become puffed-up, arrogant and haughty over the work which we've done (Luke 10:17 cf. 10:19-20; 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 cf. 4:6-7). This parable is set forth to caution against such thinking. "When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" Note: The word "unprofitable" does not mean in context "useless." It means – having rendered no service beyond what was due.

The Application: (1) We are to "maintain good works" (Titus 3:8, 14). We are to do this while serving our Master. (2) Yet, we cannot do works of super-erogation. We can never do more than our duty. We live as His servants. We should humbly say, "We have done what was our duty to do."