

A Life of Service

Sir Henry Crewe was one of the more eccentric members of a line of English nobles who occupied the stately home of Calke Abbey in Derbyshire.

There's a story that Sir Henry was very partial to a particular kind of fish pie. If his pie was not prepared in just the right way, he would fly into a rage and order his wife to dismiss the cook. His wife would dutifully assure him that she would, but she never did. Because Sir Henry was not interested in his servants and did not know what the cook looked like, he never found out.

According to the Bible, God is a master and His people are His servants. But God's attitude to His servants is very different!

Freedom in Service

You may have a problem with the idea of being a servant. Isn't freedom one of the greatest goals in life?

According to the Bible, freedom is a myth. No one is free. Just suppose that you are fortunate enough to be able to do just what you want, whenever you want, and never have to answer to anyone. In that case you are not free; you are a servant (a slave!) to yourself.

What's so bad about that? The fact is, you are a bad master! This is how the Apostle Paul puts it:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16).



He is writing to believers, and he continues to describe what it was they did when they became believers:

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (v17-18).

What is sin? What is it they were enslaved to before they became Christians? Sin is that destructive tendency we all have that makes us do what is hurtful, shameful and ungodly.

So, it's in our nature to serve. The choice we have is between serving ourselves, and serving God. To become a Christian is simply to change masters. Who is the better master? Paul answers the question emphatically at the end of the same chapter:

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (v23).

There are good masters and bad masters. If we spend our life serving ourselves there's nothing but oblivion

at the end of it. God, however, is a benevolent master who loves His servants, and the Bible abounds with descriptions of the reward of the Kingdom for those who are faithful.

What it Is to be God's Servant

The prophet Malachi sets the ground-rule. *"If I am a Master, where is My reverence?" (Malachi 1:6).* God chided His people who were being half-hearted in their worship. The starting-point for a relationship with God is reverence.

Jesus Christ gives us an insight into the life of the slave in the world of his time, and turns it into a lesson for us:

Which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, 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.' (Luke 17:7-10).

That word 'servant' is the same Greek word as the word that Paul used in Romans 6, where it was translated 'slave'. Confusingly, the translators use two English words to translate one Greek word. The original Greek word means 'bond-servant' – essentially, that's a slave. A bond-servant was the property of his master, and his master was entitled to do with him whatever he wanted. This is our relationship with

God. It's important to understand that He is our master and He owes us nothing.

Jesus Christ – Master and Servant

Jesus adds another dimension:

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants [slaves], for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:13-15).

Jesus is the Son of God, and the future King of the world. *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Philippians 2:9).* And yet he himself lived a life of service.

On the day before he died, he took his disciples to an upper room and there shared the Jewish Passover meal with them. To their huge surprise, during the meal he got up, laid aside his formal clothes, dressed himself in a towel and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. This was the most menial job in the household, and it would normally be done by the lowliest bond-servant. Then he explained:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:12-14).

This is another aspect of Christian service, and this should mark Christians out as special – their willingness always to put others first.



Lending a helping hand – in all sorts of ways...

What a recipe for life! To be servants of God, Who is a loving master and knows what's best for us and will always give it; to be servants of God's Son Jesus Christ, who loves us so much he gave his life for us; and to be servants of each other, looking out for each other's needs and knowing that others are looking out for ours.

The Reward for Service

It's a paradoxical fact that people who live only for themselves tend to be restless and unfulfilled, whereas people who put others before themselves tend to be happier and more content. The reason is simple – we were designed to serve. Service makes for a good life.

But life is about more than just the here and now. Remember what Paul said in Romans 6:23, *“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*.

What will eternal life be like? In Luke 19 beginning at verse 12, Jesus tells a story about a man who goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and gives each of his servants an amount of money to trade with while he is gone. When he returns, they each receive a reward in proportion to how well they have used

the resources and opportunities which they've been given.

The story is a picture of Jesus himself, who has gone away into heaven and will return to set up his kingdom. He's left his servants with work to do – to prepare themselves (and as many others as possible) for his kingdom. What was the reward for those who served well?

Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas’. And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities’ (Luke 19:16-17).

The reward for service is further service! The Bible gives us many glimpses of what life will be like in the Kingdom of God. In its very last chapter we're shown an exhilarating vision of the culmination of world history:

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Revelation 22:3).

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