

“Glorious Slavery”  
Exodus 21:1-11  
(Preached at Trinity, March 16, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we come to this section of the Book of Exodus God begins to give a lengthy application to the Law given on Mount Sinai. It lasts for three chapters. This section of Exodus is called the “Book of the Covenant.” It contains the civil law based upon the Moral Law.  
**Exodus 24:7** – “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient.”
2. This section isn’t nearly as exciting as the adventure of the Exodus with the plagues and miracles and great demonstrations of God’s almighty power in delivering His people but it is just as much a part of Scripture. We must approach it with a sober mind and a desire for God to speak to our hearts.
3. Although the “Book of the Covenant” was specifically designed for the specific social context of Israel it also has much to say in how we should live in our day to day lives. These laws are general applications of the Decalogue. The principles still speak to us with authority although the judicial penalties are no longer binding. Our desire should be to be conformed to more and more to Christ in all holiness and righteousness so these laws are very important to us.
4. This first section of the “Book of the Covenant” speaks on the subject of masters and slaves. This may seem strange to us for a couple reasons.
  - A. First, because God had just delivered Israel from slavery. It was a cruel slavery at the hands of the Egyptians that lasted several hundred years. One would expect God to now outlaw slavery forever. Instead He gives laws to regulate slavery.
  - B. Second, we find it difficult to think of slavery apart from the history of our own nation. To think of slavery immediately brings back thoughts of the slave trade and of the Civil War that divided our nation. It brings to mind the worst part of humanity. Fredrick Douglas, an escaped slave described slavery as “whips, scourges, chains, auctions, jails and separations; an embodiment of all the woes the imagination can conceive.”
5. It is important for us to understand that the Bible does not outlaw all slavery. In fact it presupposes its existence and does nothing to prohibit it and nowhere does it condemn it. That being said, the Bible does give strict rules to govern how slavery should be practiced.
6. We must also understand that the form of slavery as practiced in the United States and Great Britain is strictly condemned in Scripture. Our form of slavery was wicked for several reasons.
  - A. First, because in many cases it was a wicked dehumanizing of human beings.
    1. God places great value upon human beings – we were created in His image.

2. We are to treat one another with honor and respect.  
**Colossians 4:1** – “Masters, give unto *your* servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.”
- B. Second, because it was based on an illegitimate slave trade that practiced kidnapping to maintain its existence. The Bible strictly prohibits this.  
**Exodus 21:16** – “And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.”
  1. The cruelty surrounding the slave trade was the height of wickedness.
  2. John Newton wrote of the condition on the slave ships –  
 "Let it be observed, that the poor creatures, thus cramped for want of room, are likewise in irons, for the most part both hands and feet, and two together, which makes it difficult for them to turn or move, to attempt either to rise or to lie down, without hurting themselves, or each other.”
  3. Slavery in Israel was a voluntary servitude. A person would sell himself into slavery usually to pay off a debt or to make restitution for theft. An exception would be prisoners of war which were treated as conquered foe, but the slavery taught here is that of Hebrew slaves.
  4. When the Bible speaks of slavery it in no way had in mind the type of institution we had in America.
- C. Third, there was no way for a slave in America to gain his freedom – there was no grace in it, no mercy.
  1. Slavery in Israel was temporary. They were freed in the Sabbatical year.  
**Exodus 21:2** – “If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.”
  2. When a slave was set free their masters were required to provide them with the necessary provisions to start their new life.  
**Deuteronomy 15:12-15** – “*And* if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. <sup>13</sup> And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: <sup>14</sup> Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: *of that* wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. <sup>15</sup> And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.”
  3. The freed slaves were to be treated with mercy and provided the means to start fresh.
7. In **Verses 5-6** we find instructions in the case of a slave that chooses to remain with his master.
  - A. If he loved his master and that which pertained to his master he could choose to remain forever.
  - B. A permanent mark is placed upon him and then he serves his master forever. We find here a beautiful picture of a follower of Christ. We are willful slaves to Christ.

- I. The follower of Christ is a slave of Christ
- A. The New Testament uses the image of slavery to describe the follower of Christ  
**Romans 1:1** – “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,”
1. The word for servant is **δοῦλος** – a slave or bond servant
    - a. The word servant does not adequately translate the word. This word means one sold into slavery
    - b. There are other words in the NT for servant - **διάκονος** for example or **οἰκέτης** which denoted a household servant
    - c. **δοῦλος** however refers to a slave
  2. Paul knew his readers understood this word
    - a. Probably half of all the people in the Roman world of Jesus’ day were slaves – probably 10-20 million slaves
    - b. They had no freedom, no rights, no citizenship – total dependence upon the Master for provision and protection
- B. One of the chief characteristics of the Christian is that of servitude to Christ
1. Jesus Christ bought us – He has full rights over us  
**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.
  2. Before we were bought by Christ we were bondservants to sin
    - a. We were sold to sin – we could not escape its clutches
    - b. Christ by His mighty power delivered us that we might serve Him  
**Romans 6:17-18** – “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. <sup>18</sup> Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”
- II. The follower of Christ willingly submits to his slavery
- A. Once offered the opportunity to leave the master the Israelite slave could choose to remain
1. The slave might look to his master and all that pertained to his master and from a motivation of love decide to remain with his master  
**Exodus 21:5** – “And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free:”  
 The slave could buy his wife and children but it would not be fair to the master to take them. Nor would it be safe for the wife and children to go before they could be provided for. The slave could choose to stay.
  2. At that point the master would place a permanent mark upon him – a mark that marked him as a willing slave that has pledged himself to the perpetual service of his master. The slave would then abide with his master forever.  
**Exodus 21:6** – “Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”

B. A Christian is one who has looked to Christ and found everything about Him most precious

1. The NT describes it in various ways  
**Matthew 13:45-46** – “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: <sup>46</sup> Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

2. **John 12:3** – “Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, which should betray him, <sup>5</sup> Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?”

The word for “pence” here refers to a denarius which was the standard pay for a day's work. In other words Mary anointed Jesus with perfume worth almost a year's pay.

3. Why would we leave such a glorious Master? Where else would we go?  
**John 6:66-69** – “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. <sup>67</sup> Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? <sup>68</sup> Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

C. The reason people will not embrace Christ as their Master and become His slave is because they see no value in Him.

1. They lose all thinking they are gaining all  
**Matthew 16:24-25** – “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

2. For the Christian, however, we have found a most glorious slavery. We serve a most glorious Master.

III. What does it mean to be a slave of Christ?

A. Again, when we think of slavery we think of cruelty, harshness, hopelessness

1. With Christ we serve a gracious Lord – a loving Master

2. His yoke is easy and His burden is light

**Matthew 11:28-30** – “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”

3. A yoke is an image of servitude – yet servitude to Christ is glorious

a. The lost man, if he obeys God at all, obeys Him by fear. It is a harsh, unwilling service. The law condemns him and the judgment of God is terrifying to consider. His is a servile obedience motivated by a fear of God's wrath.

- b. Christians serve Christ from a heart of love.
- In Christ we have found mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
  - In Christ we have found freedom!!
  - All of our former terror is gone. We serve Christ out of a passion for Him, out of pure delight, out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to please Him. Grace has given us a freedom to serve.
- B. So what does it mean to be a slave of Christ?  
It is a life of service, but a willing glorious service.
1. Remember, we have been freed from the burden of the law  
We serve Christ out of a passion for Him, out of pure delight, out of a heart of gratitude and a desire to please Him. Grace has given us a freedom to serve.
  2. The servant of Christ obeys Him out of a sincere desire to be useful to Him. We love Him. We want to honor Him.  
We express our love in obedience  
**John 14:15** – “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”
  3. As a servant of Christ our life is caught up in service to Christ our Master  
We awaken and say, “Master, how might I be of service to You this day?”
- C. We also serve Christ by serving others.
1. Are you serving others? Do you love our Lord’s family?
  2. Do you truly care for one another? Are you sensitive to the feelings of others? Are you concerned for their wellbeing? Or are you simply so wrapped up with yourself you don’t have room for anyone else.
  3. Christianity is being able to put the wellbeing of others before yourself.  
This is service. Are you a servant?
  4. This was our Lord’s constant teaching  
**Matthew 23:11-12** – “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”
  5. Jesus demonstrated this by His own life  
**Matthew 20:28** – “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”  
He washed the feet of His disciples – a task normally done by servants.

Conclusion:

1. The question before you tonight, “Are you a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ?”  
If you are a servant, if this is your identity you are in excellent company.  
**Romans 1:1** – “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ”  
**James 1:1** – “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ”  
**2 Peter 1:1** – “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ”  
**Jude 1:1** – “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ”  
**Revelation 1:1** – “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John:”
2. Have you come to Him and said, “Master, I want to remain with You forever.”  
Has He placed His mark of ownership upon you?
  - a. What is that mark? It is holiness and love.
  - b. Are you striving to obey His commands?  
**John 15:13-14** – “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. <sup>14</sup> Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”
  - c. Do you see the importance of your brothers and sisters? Do you love them?
3. This is genuine Christianity.  
It is serving Christ. The name Lord means “Master.” We submit willfully to the Lordship of Christ.  
There is no other type of Christianity.