

Title: Who do you think you are?
Text: Luke 17.7-10
Theme: The role of a servant
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: Understanding grace means we have to understand justice. Understanding sonship means we have to understand servitude.

Who do you think you are? I ask that not to take you down a notch or two, but because that is what Jesus is asking us to come to grips with. Luke 17 opens up with 4 lessons from Jesus on what it looks like to live as a follower of Christ.

- 1) Be on your guard that you are not the occasion for others to stumble. I.e., don't be full of yourself. Be careful. Sin can trip you up and then you will trip others up. (vs. 1-2)
- 2) Be accountable to brothers and sisters and be ready to forgive. i.e., don't let vengeance rot your soul. As followers (imitators) of Christ, our mercy should be on a hair trigger. (vs. 3-4)
- 3) Trust God. Even a little bit of faith is sufficient because our faith is not in our faith, but in our sovereign God. Lean into God. (vs. 5-6)
- 4) Don't forget your place. God is exceedingly kind and generous, and we are tempted to make things about ourselves and think we deserve respect, credit, esteem, acknowledgement, titles, awards, favor, etc. Then we get snippy and prideful, ouchy, irritable, etc. (vs. 7-10) Enjoying grace comes from embracing the truth about ourselves so we can live with jaw-dropping amazement at the truth about Christ.

Read Text:

Jesus is the King of the upside-down Kingdom. In reality his kingdom is right-side up and all of ours are upside-down. He is born in a barn, raised in obscurity and poverty. He is misunderstood, ridiculed, rejected, betrayed, arrested, condemned and crucified, all while upholding the universe by the word of his power (Heb. 1.3). His kingdom is built on a value system that is counter-intuitive. Winning comes through losing, first comes from being last, leadership means to serve, living means to die, gaining comes from giving away, strength comes through weakness, being content comes from giving up control, joy comes from preferring others, comfort comes from mourning, humility brings honor, satisfaction comes from righteousness. We don't think this way naturally, which is why the life of Jesus is so intriguing. You can and should study the life of Christ for the rest of your life and you will never exhaust it.

In his kindness, God has given us 4 accounts of the life of Christ on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) each one giving us a different angle and emphasis that we might have a holistic view of Christ. We are currently studying the gospel of Luke, a 1st century doctor, who wrote this account so that we would have certainty about Christ. That certainty is designed to motivate us to trust in Christ as our King and Savior and surrender ourselves to him. But that is unnatural to us. We want to be our own god, our own savior, the king of our own castle (and the world), and make the laws, answer to ourselves and be the masters of our own fate. Even when it is so clear

that we don't know the answers we hate to admit it and there are billions of us on this planet helping to create a colossal mess of our world.

The only way out of this mess is Jesus. It is true that Jesus says, trust in him and nothing else because he is worth it. He said this at the end of chapter 14. "*any of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*" That seems like a big ask. It is not an ask; it is a demand. But he gives us so many reasons to trust him and it's not like we have any other legitimate options, do we? Why would you renounce all that you have in order to follow Jesus? Because he is the good shepherd who will track you down, find you and rescue you when you are lost. He is the father, waiting to run and embrace you and restore you when you repent of your sin and stupidity and come home. That is chapter 15. In chapter 16 he teaches us to be generous with the resources that God has given us for the forever family of God and to recognize that we are merely stewards of what God ultimately owns. The Pharisees mock Jesus for this, since they were lovers of money. They used religion as a front to build their own kingdoms that were flimsy monuments to themselves. The rich man who paid no attention to the beggar outside of his house was the poster child of the Pharisees. He looked impressive, and gave orders to his servants who carried out his wishes, but when the rich man died and found himself in hell, he began to realize that while on earth, he appeared to be the winner, that in reality he was playing the wrong game. That was chapter 16.

The closer Jesus gets to Jerusalem, the closer he gets to the cross. The closer he gets to the cross, the more he dials in on living for eternity and dealing with your own heart. Your biggest threat is not the Democratic Party, or the Republican Party, it is your own heart. Your biggest threat is not a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor; it is your own heart. There are issues with these outside threats for sure, but Jesus wants us to live with the conviction that my biggest need is to address the needs in my own heart. When I understand the true condition of my heart, then I will not trust myself, but will instead, trust Christ. I will not be concerned about being heard, being large and in charge, no. I will be concerned about advancing the fame of Christ. This is hard for us to grasp. We like Disney theology. You know, follow your heart, follow your dreams and you can get whatever you want and be whatever you want. We don't dream big enough. Our hearts betray us, but not Jesus and Jesus addresses this over and over, but time is getting short. He is "on the way to the Jerusalem" (17.11a). He not only has limited time with his disciples, but he is going to Jerusalem in order to die. The King is going to die. The King is not going to Jerusalem to lead a political, civil, military revolt that so many assumed.

Beloved, look at the history of our world. It happens repeatedly; the oppressed get sick of their oppression and they rebel and overthrow the oppressors. They did it in Syria. They are trying to do it in Iran. But what happens? Inevitably, the oppressed replace the oppressors and it usually doesn't take too long before the oppressed simply become the next oppressors, setting the stage for the next revolt. The people who identified with Christ were oppressed. They assumed that he was going to overthrow the oppressors and they would be free, and maybe, in the case of some of the disciples, be rewarded with plush corner offices, and powerful positions of privilege. This assumption is hard baked into these guys. But Jesus is going to Jerusalem to lay down his life and die for his sheep and he is preparing his disciples to follow him on that road.

Jesus is giving up his rights as king in order to be the sacrifice for our salvation. And yet, by laying down his life, and giving up his rights, we are given life and he is raised again.

Yes, Jesus wants you to rule and reign with him. But the road to glory goes through death. You have to come to the cross. You have to come to the point where you realize that you cannot save yourself, but only Jesus can save you. You have to give up your claim to control and submit your life to Christ. You have to understand that your sin is why Jesus died. What happened? Jesus died, rose again, ascended, is interceding for us, will return for us and will rule, forever. Living forever and reigning with Christ is the end game. But we don't live with him if we don't follow him. And Jesus calls us to follow him by bearing our own cross (Luke 14). We can't carry his cross. We can't die his death. Only Jesus could die a death that would pay for our sins. But the cross that we are called to carry is to identify with Christ and die to our rights, to our reputation, to our being in control, and to our sinful pursuits. You cannot look down on others when you are kneeling at the cross. A few verses earlier Jesus calls us to rebuke our brother if he sins and forgive him if he repents. When you forgive someone, you are giving up your right for revenge. But you gain a brother. You gain a restored relationship.

Jesus knows what is our ultimate good and joy. He also knows what is actually true about us. He also knows that this is hard for us to come to terms with. So, he gives us this truth which helps us hold so much of his teaching together. Notice how he draws us in. Once again, he uses a common 1st century common example that he poses with a question.

1. **What is the role of a servant?** (7-9)

It is toward the end of the day. The servant comes back to the house after a long day plowing the field or watching the sheep. Does he expect the master of the house to have prepared a meal for him when he gets in? Will the master say, "hey, come on in, relax, take it easy, refresh yourself, let me get you something to drink. I was just finishing dinner prep. It will be ready in a minute. The disciples probably rolled their eyes. That's a joke. One of our members works for a cleaning service and he cleans the executive suites of a company. Let's say one night he goes into the suite and the CEO is still there at his desk and says to the young man, hey, come over here, give me your cart, I'm going to clean the bathrooms down the hall while you finish up this zoom call for me with some clients on the west coast. What is the role of the servant?

In the 1st century setting, the servant is owed nothing. He does menial tasks like plowing the field and watching sheep. There is not much room for advancement. And in this case, the setting is not an estate with many servants, but a very modest one, with one who basically has to do it all. He doesn't expect for things to be done for him. He doesn't expect to give orders, but to be given orders. He doesn't expect to be served, but his priority is to the master. So, even after working all day, his job is not done. He simply takes off his farmer's hat and puts on his chef's hat. He does not tend to his own needs until the needs of his master have been met. At that point, he can eat, and perhaps rest a bit before he starts it up the next day.

This is his world and this is what he can expect and should expect. His life is to serve his master. When he serves the master, is it some sort of shocking or stunning achievement? Does this call for thunderous applause, atta-boys, and medals to be hung around his neck? When the servant comes in from the field, he does not expect a ticker-tape parade? He is not doing anything special. His master owes him nothing. The master can be hard, or understanding. He can be reasonable or a jerk. But he is the master and the servant is the servant. Doing what he was told to do is not shocking. This is what servants do. Basketballs bounce. Water freezes below 32 degrees. It gets cold in Detroit in the winter. Servants serve. Now comes the application. Who do you think you are?

2. **You are a bondservant to Christ.** (10)

Having set the trap, Jesus now springs the trap. Guess what? We are bondservants to Christ. This is so important for us to embrace because it will eliminate so much unnecessary angst and frustration with our circumstances or with our perception of them. Let's say that you bought a first-class ticket on Delta to go on vacation. What do you expect? You expect to get to board first, to have a place for your luggage, to be treated with respect, to have something to eat and drink, to have some leg room and elbow room. You expect comfort. Now, what if you bought a \$39 ticket on Spirit. What do you expect? Well, it better not be much cause it ain't gonna be much. You are flying with all of the other \$39 kind of people too. Years ago, Jerry and I went to a meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas. Jerry loves a good deal. I let him make the hotel reservations. His goal is to get a good deal. We stayed in the cockroach inn. I literally kept my shoes next to my bed so in the morning, I could whack the critters on the floor before I had to get out of bed. I don't let Jerry make the reservations anymore. The finance team loves him. But, when your expectations are in alignment with reality, then when reality hits you in the face, it really doesn't hurt. Knowing your place fuels humility, which means that you can relax.

Let's consider the immediate context. Your brother sins (v.3), and instead of getting full of yourself and gossip about it, or insensitive and ignore it, you go to him and point it out. You rebuke him. You do this in an effort to help him see his sin so he will repent. And he does! So, you forgive him. And you do it again, and again, and again and again. In fact, you do it, as Jesus says 7x times one day. That seems like a pretty big dog deal, doesn't it? The disciples think so. They tell the Lord that they need an upgraded version of faith to respond like that because that seems like superhero forgiveness. That seems like a level of love and sacrifice that is on a level they cannot conceive of. So, Jesus tells them this story. His point?

Doing what you are told to do, is not amazing, it is simply what the normal Christian life is supposed to look like. I hate to break it to you, but this ain't little kid soccer league. You don't get a participation award for showing up, running around and drinking juice boxes at the end. Realize this, God owes you nothing. There is nothing that you can do that puts God in debt to you. He does not need you or me. This is a great reality check. I am creation, he is Creator. I am servant, he is owner of everything. I am under his authority and I have no rights on my own.

Years ago, Cathi and I went to Ft. Jackson when our daughter completed basic training for the Army. The ceremony was over and we were getting her and her gear to come home for a few days. All she had to do was sign out and be sent on her way. I went with her to where she would be signed out. She had a ruck sack and a duffle bag. For weeks, she had been treated like dirt. Screamed at, cussed at, given ridiculous orders in order to break down any resistance to be given orders. She was used to it. She accepted it as the gauntlet she had to go through and did fine with it. As she approached the desk to be signed out, I picked up her duffle bag anticipating this being a short legality. When I did, a drill sergeant at the desk went off on her dropping f-bombs and all sorts of things because she was permitting someone else to carry her gear. I had never heard anyone talk to my daughter like that. My teeth started grinding and my blood started boiling. My eyes became heat-seeking missiles that I was burning into the forehead of that drill sergeant. I figured that this duffle bag weighed about 50 lbs. and I thought I am going to hit you so hard they are going find your bicuspid in your big toes. My heart rate was elevating when Arianna turned to me without a morsel of concern and said, "ahh, just set it down dad." She was totally unfazed. She shrugged the whole thing off as having no weight, no bearing, and no concern. It's like she didn't even hear it.

Why was she so nonplussed by it all? She embraced her role. In that setting, she was a lowly soldier, with virtually no rights and no expectations of respect, so when she was treated that way, she was not the last bit bothered.

Who do you think you are? A bondservant does not have the authority to write his own job description, and do whatever he wants. He is under authority. And typically, people get servants in order to do the jobs they don't want to do. These tend to be the menial kind of tasks. A bondservant typically does monotonous work, is not his own boss and when he does what he is commanded to do, it is not a surprise. Our serving does not earn us merit. We are unworthy servants, meaning, we do not have the status to say what we will or will not do. Our role is to submit and when we do that, we have simply done our duty. Our obedience to God does not make God indebted to us. God is not obligated to do what I want simply because I obey him. I never have leverage that puts me in a position to demand something from God.

Can the clay say to the potter, "I want you to make me into a vase, or a bowl, or a dish for dog food?" No. The potter makes that decision. And when you embrace your role as the clay and God's role as the potter, you are able to settle into your place in his world. Look at how this played out for Paul.

Philippians 1. Paul is writing this letter from prison and there is no whining and no complaining. In fact, he says (v.12ff) how wild this whole ride has been. His time in prison has given him an opportunity to tell about the whole imperial guard about Christ. He's thinking, honestly, when else would I have the chance to do this? He goes on to say that it looks like he is either going to be executed or set free. If he had his druthers, he would like to be executed in order to be with Christ, but he figures that the Lord will most likely want him to wrap a few more things up before that happens, which is fine with him too because he would be able to see the Philippian

believers again. Heads I win, tails I win. And why did it play out this way for Paul? Because this is what Christ did for us.

3. **Your Master serves you.** (surprised by grace)

Jesus is not a bondservant; he is the Son of God. He is the 2nd person of the Trinity, the creator of the world and everything in it, and yet, he set aside his glory as God to become part of his own creation. He made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and accepted the humiliating treatment that came from being condemned as a criminal. He became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Why did Paul tell us that Jesus did that? Because he tells us in v.3 to do nothing from rivalry or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. I.e., act like you are, a bondservant. You can do that because that really is what you are. And you can do that because Christ did that for you, and that is not what he is. That is how we are surprised by grace. Don't assume it. You are a bondservant. But enjoy it, because by it, you are in the family – forever.

- What are 1 or 2 areas in your life that really frustrate you?
- Is any of that frustration fueled by not getting what you want and think you deserve?
- How does this text help you set more realistic expectations?