

The Bible and Slavery: How to be One

31 in our series from Paul's letter to the Ephesians

Ephesians 6:5-9

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Prayer

Lord you are beautiful. We pray that you, by the power of your Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus the Christ would help us to see your beauty. Help us to see your glory. This morning we're preaching into such an area of pain, shame, guilt, and evil. We ask that you would open our hearts to your Word and that your Word would take root in our heart.

We pray that you would guard us from the designs and schemes of the evil one.

So we claim your covenant blood over this place, over this sanctuary, over this building, these people, this message and how it goes out. Guard us from the lies of the evil one and fill us with truth, and set us all free.

In Jesus' name help us to preach. Amen

Message

From the 16th to the 19th century, approximately 12 million African slaves were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean. Millions more died en route. Sometimes, they were simply thrown overboard when European slavers realized they didn't have enough supplies or slaves were deemed unhealthy. Not all or even most were shipped to the United States, but by 1865 there were four million slaves in our country.

Slaves were bought and sold as property, even by those that wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence, our founding fathers: Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin. I consider it to be the darkest chapter of our nation's history, except that it's not a chapter, it's most of the book, and we're still trying to recover.

Clip from *Amistad*

[In this clip we see crowds of slaves on a ship. One of them is seen being shot by a slave master. We see their chains, their mistreatment, and their beatings. The scene then changes to slaves lying down on the ship in a storm, in the dark of night. A woman cries out in pain and a baby is born on the ship, in the dark of night, amidst the hardship and pain. The scene ends with the mother caressing her child.]

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood....

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; one day right there in Alabama little black boys and little black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together....

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California.

But not only that.

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

Martin Luther King Jr.

Now our text...

Ephesians 6:5-9

Slaves (doulos), obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants (doulos) of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart (literally: psyche, "soul"), rendering service with a good will as to the Lord (same word as "Master") and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave (doulos) or is free. Masters do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Now that's a bit embarrassing isn't it? You can bet that slave traders have used those verses for 2000 years. In Colossians 3, Paul says the same thing. In 1 Peter 2, Peter says the same thing. The whole book of Philemon is a letter from Saint Paul to a slave owner named Philemon informing him that Paul is sending Onesimus (Philemon's runaway slave) back to Philemon.

It's all very embarrassing, and so modern enlightened believers work desperately to explain these verses away. Some translations read "servant" or "bond servant" in place of "slave" but the Greek is the word *doulos*, which clearly means: "slave." There is another word for "servant,"

diakonos” which is translated “servant,” “minister,” or “deacon.” The situation is so difficult that many simply say, “Well, in these spots, the Bible is wrong.” Or perhaps, “Peter and Paul were wrong and Jesus would disagree.” Or perhaps, “They all meant well, but they were simply products of their time and therefore, mistaken, which assumes that we’re *not* mistaken, and we are *not* products of our own time.

Some have argued that slavery in places like Ephesus in the Roman Empire just wasn’t that bad. Well, the Roman Empire didn’t have four million slaves but *sixty million* slaves. A Roman slave was the property of the “*Pater Familias*,” the father and head of the Roman household. He had the legal right to execute his slaves, and so there are horrid instances of murder and abuse in ancient Roman documents.

Some Christian commentators cite instances of leniency, hoping to lessen the blow. For instance: in 75 AD Vespasian ruled, that in certain cases, female slaves could obtain liberty through prostitution, under the direction of their masters. In the second century, Hadrian may have forbidden the execution of slaves by their masters, may have...but even so, that hardly makes it acceptable. *Doulas* means: “slave,” and slaves had no “rights.” Actually, it must’ve been a bit shocking that Paul would even address slaves as if they had a will of their own, even a free will of their own.

Well, the Roman Empire literally ran on slaves and even the Jews had slaves, although Old Testament law was far more humane than Roman law. But by the time of Saint Paul, the Jews themselves were effectively slaves to the Romans, just as they once had been slaves to the Egyptians. Slave means slave. To make matters worse, the “*Pater Familias*,” the head of the Roman household not only had absolute power over his slaves; he also had absolute power over his children. He could execute his children and infanticide was a common practice.

He had absolute power over his slaves, his children, and his wife. And that’s what makes Ephesians 5 & 6 even more challenging for us modern readers. After informing us:

1:3 “*We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...*”

and....

1:19 “*there is an immeasurable power in us that believe...*”

and...

2:14 “*He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility...making us one...*”

and...

4:6 “*There is one God and Father of all...*”

After all of that... in Ephesians 5 & 6 Paul writes,

“*Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord.*”

“*Children obey your parents in the Lord.*”

“*Slaves obey your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart as you would Christ.*”

That’s challenging for any of us...and downright terrifying for anyone that’s ever been used, abused, or treated like a slave.

And so we wonder:

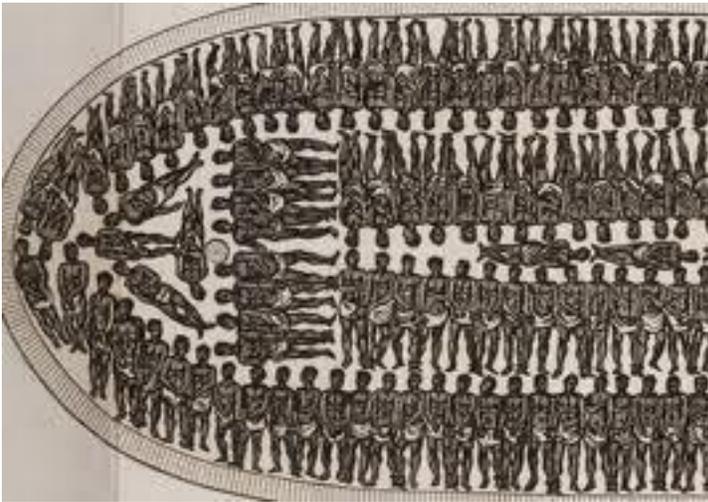
“Why doesn’t Paul take ‘these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, with certain inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?’”

“Why doesn’t Paul agree with the words of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and Benjamin Franklin?”

“Why doesn’t Paul tell them to act like Americans?”

I mean...we’ve really worked hard as a country to ensure everyone’s “rights,” to turn every slave into a master.

And so, we’ve gone from this:



To this:



The land of the master...where everyone is the lord of his or her own domain. Well, I need to say, I’m incredibly proud of our progress. And yet, for all of our progress, you’ve got to ask: “Have

we really abolished slavery?" We've turned a lot of slaves into masters, but have we abolished slavery?

It seems to me that you can enslave people with more than just iron chains. You can enslave people with...

Political Chains...

[Image of the Berlin Wall]

Economic Chains...

[Image of an African American homeless man pushing a grocery cart]

Sociological Chains...

[Image of slaves picking cotton with a billboard above them that read "Free Luxury Service From Your Motel"]

Psychological Chains...

[Image of a woman struggling with depression]

And...Theological Chains...That's how Satan does it. He enslaves us with a lie about the logos of Theos, a lie about the Word of God, so we don't trust God. And instead, we trust our own flesh and the desires of our own body and mind.

Well, through legislation, here in America, we've turned every slave into a master, and yet, masters seem to always find a way to make slaves out of somebody.

I watched Matt Lower interview Paula Dean on the Today Show. And let me say, I don't know if she's a racist but any woman that invents something as decadent and tempting as a bacon cheeseburger doughnut...ought to be punished.... But how weird is it for a wealthy middle-aged white man, who grew up in the 60's, to be so thoroughly condescending to an old southern woman for using the "N-word" 30 years ago?

For obvious reasons, white Americans carry a boatload of guilt and shame. When earthly masters feel shame, they usually don't repent. They make more rules and find scapegoats. Rather than washing feet...they find someone to blame. Kind of like I'm blaming Matt Lauer right now, and Matt Lauer blames Paula Dean, and Paula Dean blames Wal-Mart, and Wal-Mart lawyers will find someone to blame. We all want someone else to blame, so we make more rules, claim our rights, and find someone to blame, because in America, by law, we turn every slave into a master.

You know, the entire nation of Israel was a nation of former slaves. You know the story. God led the Jews out of Egypt and gave them the law, the old covenant law.

In John 8:31, "Jesus said to Jews who had believed in him, 'If you abide in my word...you will know the truth and the truth will set you free' and they answered, 'We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say 'you will become free?'" In other words: "We're not slaves!"

Jesus answered, "Truly, everyone who commits sin is a *"doulos,"* a slave...a slave to sin."

Well, that offended the Jews and they quite literally made Jesus their scapegoat. They quite literally made the Lord and Master their slave. And they strung him up on a tree and He let them.

Paul writes, "*Slaves obey your earthly masters...as you would Christ.*"

About thirty years ago, I was sitting down front on the right side of the lecture hall in New Testament Intro at Fuller Seminary. We had just had a long discussion about these troubling verses in 1 Peter, Colossians, and Ephesians, when all of a sudden it hit me: Maybe Paul wasn't anti-slavery, because he was *pro*-slavery. Maybe Jesus wasn't *anti*-slavery, because he was *pro*-slave. I mean, what if the problem wasn't the slaves, but the masters? What if you turned everyone into a slave? I mean, if you really wanted to abolish the Satanic, earthly, fleshly institution of the master and slave, you could try to turn every slave into a master, or you could try to turn every master into a slave.

The Old Covenant can turn slaves into masters. The law can turn slaves into masters. Islam can turn slaves into masters. Judaism can turn slaves into masters. The United States government can turn slaves into masters. But only God, in Christ Jesus, through the power of the New and Eternal Covenant can turn masters into slaves, and I mean slaves of righteousness, men and women who choose to wash the feet of their enemies because they freely want to...because they have a dream...even more...they've become a dream; they've become God's dream: Men and women in His own image.

And who is He? Who is He really? He's the Master who took the form of a *doulos* and humbled himself to the point of getting lynched on a tree. I mean, maybe Paul didn't tell slaves to become masters because he actually wanted every master to become a slave. Because the slaves weren't wrong...but right...and the masters weren't right...but wrong. I mean, maybe the life of a slave is not inconsistent with love, but the *definition* of love: one person surrendering their rights for another person, one person serving the next person and the next person serving that person. Imagine three persons each serving the other person...like three persons and one substance called Love, and God is Love. If all became slaves, we might all become one...like God is ONE.

You know Paul actually wrote, "*Though I am free from all, I have made myself a slave to all.*" And he wrote, "Imitate me," and now he's writing Ephesians from a prison cell and he's going to tell us later, from a prison cell, that he's also in chains. See maybe he actually meant this stuff, and we Americans just don't get it...even if we have a Master of Divinity degree. I took knowledge of good and evil, earned a Master of Divinity, and I still don't get it.

Jesus said to his disciples: *"You know that the rulers of the nations lord it over them and their masters wield power over them. It shall not be so among you – but whoever would be great among you must be your servant (diakonos) and whoever would be first must be your slave (doulos) even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve."*

See? It wasn't just Peter and Paul, the slave thing started with Jesus.

James Cone is an African American pastor/preacher and systematic theologian of Union Theological Seminary. A friend once heard him preach to a wealthy white congregation and Rev. Dr. Cone began his sermon with this line, "Jesus is a nigger..." he shouted it, "and all who would follow him must be ready to become a nigger too."

And now by using the "N word," I think he meant: Jew, Kike, DeGo, Spick, Kracker, White man, Arab, Paula Dean, Matt Lauer. He didn't mean race; he meant whomever you put on the other side of the dividing wall of hostility. He meant the "last and least of these," Christ's brethren. He meant the slave who has no rights, no legal recourse, no honor, and no respect in this world.

Jesus makes Himself that, and I understand your objection to doing that:

"If you do that you'll get yourself killed..." yep, just like Paul.

"If you live like that they'll crucify you..." yep, just like Jesus.

"If you do that you'll get yourself martyred..." yep, just like Martin Luther King.

And.... *"Blessed are you..."* Blessed are you poor, you that hunger now, that weep now."

"Blessed are you..." when people hate you, and exclude you, and revile you, and spurn you as evil on account of the Son of Man.

"Blessed are you who know these things and do these things."

But.... *"Woe to the rich now...the full now,"* said Jesus.

"Woe to you when all people speak well of you," said Jesus

"Woe to the masters-the lords of this earth," said Jesus.

There are certain stories that have literally changed my life, stories I'll tell every few years, stories I hope you never forget, and this is one of them. Several years ago, around the time I took New Testament Intro at Fuller Seminary, I got to hear world renowned Harvard Psychologist Dr. Robert Coles speak at the National Youth Workers Convention. He told us a story about Ruby Bridges.

In 1960, a federal judge ordered the forced desegregation of New Orleans School District and so, every day six-year-old Ruby Bridges was forced to attend the William Frank Elementary School alone...because all the other students were white and Ruby was black, and because Ruby was there, white parents wouldn't allow their white children to be there. Because the New Orleans police refused to protect Ruby, the federal judge ordered federal marshals to escort Ruby to and from school every day.



Past a mob of angry white people yelling, "We're gonna kill you...nigger."

Distressed by this the federal judge called on Dr. Coles to fly to New Orleans and meet with Ruby on a regular basis. Dr. Coles told us how he was utterly mystified by six-year-old Ruby; for she seems so content, so happy, so blessed, so free.

One day, Ruby's teacher told Dr. Coles that she had observed something strange and rather troubling that morning. As usual the four federal marshals were walking Ruby through the crowd but this morning she stopped and began talking. Nervously, the federal marshals had tried to get Ruby to keep moving, but she wouldn't budge. She stood there looking at the crowd and talking. Suddenly, she finished and walked into the school.

Later, Dr. Coles sat Ruby down and questioned her about the incident, he said, "Ruby why were you talking to those people?" She looked surprised and said, "I wasn't." Dr. Coles replied, "Ruby your teacher saw you from the window. You stopped and she saw you talking." Ruby thought a moment and then said, "I wasn't talking to *them*...I was praying. Every morning before I start my walk, and every afternoon, I say the same prayer. This morning I forgot to say my prayer, but when I saw those people, I remembered and so I stopped and said my prayer. I pray for those people."

Thinking he must be missing something Dr. Coles said, "Ruby...you pray for those people?" She said, "Yes." He said, "You pray for the people in that angry crowd that say such mean things about you? You pray for them?" Ruby looked at the eminent Dr. Coles, got this confused look on her face and said, "Well...don't you think they need prayin' for?"

According to Jesus, according to Paul, who needs the most prayin' for?

The last or the first?

The poor or the rich?

The weak or the strong?

The slave or his master?

She said, "Well, don't you think they need prayin' for?" Dr. Coles said, "What do you pray?" Ruby answered, "Every time I say the same prayer: 'Please God, try to forgive those people, 'cause even if they say those bad things, they don't know what they're doing. So you could forgive them, just like you forgave those folks a long time ago, when they said those bad things about you.'"

Maybe Ruby Bridges really was blessed. And maybe it's folks like Ruby Bridges that change the world. Just think of it: a female, a child, and a child of former slaves, that's who's preaching the sermon this morning. But it's not just Ruby, it's the Word of God in Ruby.

Let's read Ephesians one more time.

In Ephesians 5:21 Paul addresses females, which was highly irregular, and rather than turning females into males, he teaches that we are all the Bride of Christ.

In Ephesians 6:1 Paul addresses children, which was highly irregular and he teaches that we're all children of God.

In Ephesians 6:5-8 He addresses slaves:

Slaves (doulos), obey your earthly masters (literally: "masters according to the flesh") with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.

Jesus said, "*Whatever you do unto the least of these...*" and He said, "*the first will be last (or least).*" I mean, maybe Jesus is even hiding in the hellish dark heart of a master according to the flesh...And, that master may be *master of your flesh*, but Jesus is the *Master of your soul*.

...obey as you would Christ,

SO if CHRIST and your earthly MASTER disagree, obey Christ.

...obey as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants ("slaves") of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart (literally: psyche, "soul"), rendering service with a good will as to the Lord (same word as "Master") and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave (doulos) or is free.

So the key to fulfilling, meaningful, and enjoyable work is not the work...but the One you do it for.

So if you don't like your job, do it for Jesus. Be a slave for men, because you're not serving men...but Jesus.

Be a slave of Jesus, commissioned to serve your earthly master.

"Obey your... masters...rendering service to the Lord...Masters do the same to them..."

Did you catch that?

There's the revolution: Masters you must become slaves to your slaves!

...with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ."

Paul says the same in Colossians, and Peter says the same in 1 Peter, and in Philemon, Paul tells Philemon:

I'm sending Onesimus back as my own child, my own heart. ...perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever... Receive him back as a beloved brother!

You Know, if Philemon just released Onesimus, Onesimus would be chained to destitution and poverty...

Paul writes,

"Take him back as a brother,

as a brother,

as a beloved brother in the Lord."

[Peter begins singing...]

*Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!*

You hear it? Paul was saying, "I have a dream!" Martin Luther King was saying, "I have a dream! "But the way we get there is NOT by turning slaves into masters, BUT by turning every master into a slave. "I have a dream" and Jesus is the dream: the Master of all who became slave of all.

"I have a dream, because the dream has me."

And so Paul writes:

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

The very next thing that Paul speaks of in Ephesians, is battling the "Principalities and Powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places..."

And that makes some sense... because...

It's not the earthly masters that change this earth...

It's not the world rulers that change this world... it's the slaves.

And their weapons are not *carnal* but *spiritual*:

It's the power of the powerless;
the power to lay power down;

the power of Love... and God is Love.

You see? "The immeasurable greatness of power," true power was not being exercised by the New Orleans Police department, the angry crowd, or even the U.S. Supreme Court. The power with which Christ "subjects all thing to Himself was operating and exercised in six-year-old Ruby Bridges.

It's the slaves of Christ that change the world.

It's the servants of Love that wield true power.

It's not the governor of Alabama.

It's Martin Luther King writing letters in Birmingham Jail.

It's not Sheriff Clark and his deputies on the bridge outside Selma Alabama.

It's the worshipers that they beat with billy clubs as they knelt and prayed, and the nation watched.

It's not the government of South Africa or Great Britain...

but Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and Mahatma Gandhi that change the world.

It's not the Popes and Cardinals

but Saint Francis and Mother Theresa, and slaves like Saint Patrick.

It's not Barbarian hordes and foreign armies...

but Christians thrown to lions that undo the Empires.

It's not the Roman Empire that hold true power

but an old Jewish man named Paul, beaten, flogged, chained to a wall, and yet writing letters in that Roman jail.

It's not slaves that go to war like Spartacus.

It's not even great statesmen like Thomas Jefferson.

It's not even the democratic vote of an angry populace chanting: "Crucify, crucify, crucify!"

No, it's one naked, beaten, and battered Slave, nailed to a tree, where all flesh will see Him together and look...He's speaking a prayer: "*Father forgive them; for they don't know what they're doing.*"

That's the power that created the world, the Word that was spoken into the void; that's the power that crushes the ancient dragon and makes all things new.

So Paul writes,

Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

No partiality and no threatening, writes Paul. Is that what the modern American Evangelical church is known for? No partiality and not threatening? Maybe that's why we seem to have lost our power. We have power to lobby congress and turn shopping malls into church buildings, but we seem to have lost the power to change hearts. While the powerless church in places like China and sub-Saharan Africa, where you can still get crucified, is telling a very different story.

"No threatening," writes Paul. But that's how the powers and the principalities of this world operate, and "no partiality," "no *prosopolempsia*," literally no "receiving face," no judging by appearance but by the content of a person's character.

And yet, we've argued that God arbitrarily chooses some for salvation and some for eternal torment. And if not that, we argue that God lets you in if you say a prayer at the back of a pamphlet and doesn't if you don't, regardless of what you do.

In Romans 2:6, Paul writes, *"He will render to each according to what he has done."* And Paul explains that what God wants you to do is have faith. He wants you to trust Him. The one you trust determines all that you do. Trust is the content of a Godly character.

Romans 2:6 *"He will render to each one according to what he has done..."*

Romans 2:11 *"For there is no prosopolempsia, no partiality, no favoritism with God."*

1 Peter 1:17 Peter writes, *"the one you call Father judges each one without prosopolempsia."*

You see, a father wants trust in each of His children, and the good father judges or discerns each child according to the content of his character. And Paul told us, or discerns, that there is one God and Father of all. And He speaks His Word to create trust in all, that is...Jesus came to save all...as the slave of all.

But when we the church seek to be master of all, rather than servant of all, we resort to threats and theologies of partiality, and then we no longer testify to our good father. Instead, we testify to the "principalities and powers of this world. We refuse to pick up our crosses and can no longer change the world; for we've become the world.

It's not slaves who make themselves masters that change the world, but masters who submit to being slaves; for it's the Master who made Himself a slave to all that made the world and now redeems all: Jesus Christ, enthroned and lifted up on a cross is the glory of God.

And all flesh "will see it together." And all humanity, all creation will praise the slaughtered lamb standing on the throne, as black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics join hands and sing: *"To Him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever."*

And I suspect they may also sing: "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty; I'm free at last." And what will they be free from? Their own flesh, sinful flesh, under the authority of principalities and powers of this world. And what will they be free to do? Love and be loved. A good free will is trust in God—trust in Love. When you freely will, what God freely wills, you're truly free and slave to all.

Well, you don't have to wait for that day to be free.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus made Himself a slave and did the work of a slave. He washed his disciples' feet saying, *"If you know these things blessed are you (happy are you) if you do them."*

Do you know what makes me miserable? I've thought about this a lot.

It's my own desire to make myself first: to make myself the master, to make myself in the image of God, to make myself a master of divinity. It's my ego, my pride, my flesh.

Several years ago, I went through something that brutalized my ego. Everything I thought I built was taken away, and I felt used and abused, like a slave. But I don't think I was being enslaved; I was being set free.

It's the masters who are truly in bondage to this world and the sinful desires of their own flesh. It's the slaves who choose to be slaves that are truly free, free to love and be loved.

During that time, a friend arranged a lunch with some other pastors and church leaders to encourage me. They were inner city pastors, all African Americans. They shared their names and one said, "My last name is Hiatt." I said, "Oh wow!" "How do you spell it?" He said, "H-i-e-t-t, it's an uncommon spelling." I said, "My name is Hiatt; it's the same spelling." I looked at him and he at me, and we both knew I was related to slave owners, and he was related to their slaves; I felt such shame. Then he smiled and I smiled. We laughed, held hands and prayed as brothers, the Hiatt brothers, and it was a dream.

Now, I would've loved that any day of my life, but that day I remember thinking, "Dear God, thank you that I'm not a master; I'm your slave because now I'm free. Free to love my brother, and free to love You; I'm blessed."

So you see, if you've been used and abused, if you've been hated and reviled, if you've been treated like a slave, maybe it's not a curse...but a blessing.

Satan will tell you that you're "last of all and least of all" while God is introducing you to the "best of all and first of all, your brother...Jesus Christ.

I was publicly tried and condemned; I'm sure I did many things wrong, but after the crowd voted and pronounced judgment, partly out of fear for my own soul, I asked if I could pray, and I prayed that God would forgive. The moment I said, "forgive" my wife had a vision: She saw Jesus come and take me down off of a cross. At that time, that day felt like the absolute worst day of my life, but if life is not about making yourself the master but instead learning to be a slave like Christ, well then, my worst day was my very best day.

Jesus is born in places like that. Did you see that baby born in that slave ship in the clip at the start of the sermon?

Jesus is born in places like that.

Jesus is glorified in places like that.

Jesus conquers *me* in places like that.

Jesus crushes the dragon and conquers the world in places like that, through people like us, when we love like Him.

It's there that He Himself becomes the content of our character, and we don't only "have a dream," we become God's dream: Men and women created in the very image of Love.

So close your eyes, and I want you to picture an angry crowd, your angry crowd...you know who they are...maybe kids at school, a friend who betrayed you, family who abused you, people that

treated you like a slave. Look at them, and think of Jesus. Now say, "Father, they don't know what they were doing; forgive them. 'You could forgive them just like you forgave those people that said bad things about you.' In Jesus' name, Father forgive them."

God has a dream; you are His dream.

Communion

On the night that the Master was betrayed by all of us, He took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you; take and eat." And in the same manner, He took the cup and said, "This cup is the new, eternal covenant, the new covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it all of you; do it in remembrance of me." He calls you to come to His banqueting table. The bread and the wine are the life of Jesus given to you. So take it and then worship singing a song about His amazing grace.

His grace really is amazing. That song (Amazing Grace) was written by an ex slave trader, who himself became a slave of slave traders, and then a slave of Jesus. You know, all the best songs are written by people like that. God is turning you into a good singer. So let's worship Him.

Benediction

Jesus you are mighty to save. God, when I read the Bible, I think the thought that blows my mind the most is not that you would save the slave Onesimus but that you would save the slave owner named Saul, who wrote what we read this morning, whom you met on the road to Damascus as he was going there with papers to capture believers in you. He was going there to capture them, to enslave them, either for execution or to be thrown into bondage as a slave, but Lord Jesus you saved Saul and turned him into Saint Paul. You are mighty to save. Save us! In Jesus' name we ask it, Amen.

So, we are all in different roles in society and in different relationships. In certain roles, you are more like the slave, and in others you are more like the master. Some people in our congregation don't have a place to sleep; others run corporations. But you see, you are all called to be slaves.

So, if you're in that slave position, serve your boss, serve your master, as if you were serving Christ. And if you're in that master position, well...wash the feet of your employees (of the servants, of the slaves.) You see, we are all brothers, and we're going to an incredible party with wives, and children, and former slaves.

We forget that this whole section on women, children, and slaves begins with one verse where Paul says, "*being filled with the Holy Spirit subject yourselves one to another.*" You see, that's not bad news, that's great news because that's how they do it in the God-head, the Trinity, the Kingdom of Heaven. That my friends is a very happy place, so in Jesus' name, believe the gospel and be blessed. Amen

Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.