

Servant Heart 11-11-01

Romans 1:1,9 6:19-21, 1Corinthians 7:22, 1 Peter 2:16

Romans 1:1 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> *Paul, a **servant** of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—*

The Apostle Paul was such a giant of the faith because he was so small. The name means 'small'. It was because he recognized that he was so small that the Lord could so mightily use him. In his own eyes he was the worst sinner, but he also knew there was great opportunity for God to work when the instrument knows the source is all God. All the glory goes to God. He knew he had a mighty calling, but he also knew all the might was in God and not himself. This is evident in his favorite term for his relation to Jesus, servant. He put this description of himself first, which in the Greek tradition, meant it ranked higher in importance than descriptions that followed. Peter, James and Jude used the same descriptive order in the introduction to their letters.

Servant comes from the Greek word *doulos* - one who puts himself in servitude to another, or is sold as a possession. Peter Chrysologus living in those days summed up the attitude of the average Roman toward his slave: "Whatever a master does to a slave undeservedly, in anger, willingly, unwillingly, in forgetfulness, after careful thought, knowingly, unknowingly, is judgment, justice and law." Romans were very demanding of their slaves. Many of the readers of this letter to the Romans would be slaves. They knew what it meant in the context of their own existence.

Most slaves were either taken as captives during a war or had sold themselves into slavery to survive. Some were born into slavery, their mother being a slave. When they were no longer physically able, they could be discarded like a worn out tool. In Roman writings they are sometimes referred to as tools. "The only difference between a slave and a cart," one Roman author writes, "is that the slave can talk." If they disobeyed or did not carry out their orders in satisfactory manner, they could be beaten as severely as their owner thought necessary. Many lived in fear of these beatings. Most figured out how to keep their master happy and lived within the boundaries of efficiency prescribed by him. Some were more educated than their master and were used to educate the children of their master. It was a life in which you really had little or no desires of your own. The movies that portray slaves as friends of their masters are quite contrary to the vast majority of Roman historical accounts. That is what made the Centurion, who wanted Jesus to heal his servant, so unique.

Paul submitted himself as a slave upon his first encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. When he was blown off his horse and onto his face in the dirt, he responds as a submitted slave, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" He recognized that his efforts to do good had amounted to persecution of Almighty God. What else can you do but surrender yourself to His mercy as His slave? It is reminiscent of last week's story of Judah and his brothers who were caught with the cup of

Joseph. Judah lamented, "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves..."

The Apostle Paul often takes a Greek word and uses it in a way that gives it new meaning and dignity. The very concept of this word being used in this new way came from his Master, Jesus, the Christ. John 15:15 (NIV)<sup>15</sup> *I no longer call you servants, (slaves) because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.* Jesus differentiated the way a slave was treated and the way He treated them. He was willing to share the things revealed of His Father, and that meant the disciples were held dear to Him in friendship. They were co-laborers involved in His Kingdom. This was something Romans did not consider with their slaves. Yet, in the same chapter, our actions and Jesus' are described in a way that is very similar to the duty of a slave. John 15:10 (NIV)<sup>10</sup> *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.* We are to be obedient like a slave, as Jesus was, but in doing so, we are in our Master's love. His commands come from His loving heart for us. When Paul uses the word slave it incorporates this new definition of being friends, loved by their Master, informed of Jesus' revelation of the Father.

Slaves of the Caesar could hold their head higher than that of other slaves. If a Roman citizen confronted a slave, the slave had better back down. But if the slave had the Caesar's brand in his forehead, that Roman better be careful. This slave was about the business of the Caesar. That brand gave him a dignity higher than that of the common slave. Paul says, in our text, he is a slave and official representative (*apostolos*) of the King of kings! That means he is a humble servant but one who represents the greatest authority that ever will be. Although you and I are not apostles, we are servants of the King of kings. We obey the will of another, but that is the noblest position in which man can walk. It is the one in which our Lord himself walked. "I came not to do my own will, but the will of the One who sent me."

Paul realized he was once a slave of sin along with all of mankind. John 8:34 (NIV)<sup>34</sup> *Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.* 2 Peter 2:19 (NIV)<sup>19</sup> *They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity--for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.* Romans 6:20-21 (NIV)<sup>20</sup> *When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.*<sup>21</sup> *What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!* But as soon as he met the living Lord Jesus, he offered himself to Him as a slave to Him. His letters tell us that is the normal Christian life. We stop serving our former master, Satan, who used our old nature to control us, and we submit to a new Master. The old master demanded action that resulted in death. The new Master leads us in the way of Life. This is the call to every Christian man and woman. Give up your right to yourself and surrender it to your Lord who purchased you with his own blood. Submit yourself to the Lord Jesus as His servant.

Romans 6:19b *Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.* 1 Corinthians 7:22 (NIV)<sup>22</sup> *For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave.* This was the revelation to the Apostle Peter also: 1 Peter 2:16 (NIV)<sup>16</sup> *Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.*

This call to be a servant of God is the call to every believer. It's not that you must do this or that in a particular way to be accepted. It's the response of a submitted heart to the revelation of an omnipotent and holy God who has set his love on you. That response is like the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, or Peter at his restoration, or Mary before the Angel Gabriel Luke 1:38 (NIV)<sup>38</sup> *"I am the Lord's servant, (doule, female slave)"* Mary answered. *"May it be to me as you have said."* You are God, I am not. It is an honor to be your slave, a higher honor than any man who thinks he is free.

Are we truly servants of the Most High God? How does that translate itself into our daily lives? First, it means that we put His will above our own. When we know His leading, our plans and desires are set aside. He never insists. As I read to my high-school class about Jacob and his deceptions, one of my students asked why God doesn't just insist and order us to do or not do things. I immediately thought of the marriage illustration. I asked the ladies in the class how they would like it if their future husband always told them exactly what they wanted them to do or not do and demanded they obey. A big round of grumbles and moans went up in that classroom. That is why! Jesus is in a love relationship with you. What an incredible honor! Abraham's wife, Sarah, called her husband, lord. That suggests she considered herself his servant. If you read their story, you will see she didn't always act like a servant. She was quite insistent at times, and Abraham often acted at her suggestion. Our relationship with God is a love relationship, and we submit, as a servant would, out of that love, one for another. His gentleness is evidence of just how loving and patient with us He is. Unlike us, He is always right, but He never demands that you do His will, He lovingly asks for your obedience for your own good. Wisdom and love on our part will put His requests above our own.

Servants watched and listened carefully to discern their master's desire. The obtuse servant never was advanced and served in the most menial tasks. A servant like Joseph, on the other hand, was quickly promoted. Eph 6:5 (NIV)<sup>5</sup> *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.* With that kind of attitude and attention to his master, he soon was overseer of the whole house of Potiphar. Do we give attention to our Lord to carry out with faithful diligence His directions?

Psalms 123:2 (NIV)<sup>2</sup> *As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our*

*God, till he shows us his mercy.* Slaves watched intently the hand signals of their master to know what his desire was. Once they saw the instruction signal they would jump to duty. As servants of the Lord, are we watching intently, moment by moment, to discern His desire? Or are we so absorbed in satisfying ourselves that we don't have time to watch for His signals? He won't beat you if you missed it, but you did just miss an opportunity to be blessed by serving the One who loves you so much.

I think most of you are familiar with the Old Testament ritual of giving yourself to a master. (Exodus 21:5,6 Deuteronomy 15:17) If after being freed from service as a slave you wanted to stay with that master because you love him and desire to serve him, then your right ear was punched with an awl to the doorpost of his home. The symbolism is that your ear is open to that master. When a request is made, you hear and act to meet the need.

Watching and listening are the most notable characteristics of a good servant. God had called the nation of Israel to be His servant. In Acts 28 Paul quotes Isaiah as to why God could not have them as servants. Acts 28:26-28 (NIV)<sup>26</sup> "*Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.'*"<sup>27</sup> *For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.*"<sup>28</sup> *"Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"*

The heart is callused because they prefer their own desires to God's. They saw but would not perceive because they had no desire to. Not wishing to see they closed their eyes. We can do the very same thing. One thing we can say about servants like the Apostle Paul, his desire was to know God's desire. Therefore, he could hear and understand. He could see and perceive what God was asking of Him. Your ability to hear and see is in direct correlation to your desire toward Him.

How is your desire toward Almighty God? The Psalmist said in Psalms 73:25 (NIV)<sup>25</sup> *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.* The desire set upon God results in the eyes and ears being open to Him. I can make you feel guilty for not listening more, not watching more carefully, not praying more, or reading your Bible more faithfully, but those actions are the results not the cause. The cause is our desire set upon God. It is an act of our will. It is the grace of God. Have you pleaded with God to deepen your love for Him? Have you asked for all your desire to be toward Him? You can try to be a servant, but it takes an encounter with the Lover of your soul to turn your desire to Him.

He asks us to love Him with our all. When we reach out, He will meet us. Sometimes we slip away from this place of desiring Him and Him alone, and things creep in between us. We have to recognize what has happened, repent, and go back to the place of our first love. Your listening and watching are a gauge of your desire. When we find it near zero, any time we find it not as high as it has been in

the past, we need to fall at His feet and ask to be restored. That is where this heart of a servant is found. It is not the slave who must obey out of fear but the love slave who longs to be his Master's servant. Will you be His slave? Will you set your desire on Him above all else?

Heaven is for servants. If you ever wondered what we will be doing there you only need to look to Revelation. We will be serving Him. Rev 22:3-4 (NIV)<sup>3</sup> *No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.*<sup>4</sup> *They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.*

I want to close with the blessing of Solomon to the people of Israel assembled for the dedication of the Temple. We are the Temple of God. Sometimes we need to rededicate this temple to His use. This blessing may even be more fitting today than it was then.

1 Kings 8:56-61 (NIV)<sup>56</sup> *"Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. (The author of Hebrews says that the real rest is for those who have entered into Christ.) Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. (And the greatest promise to Moses was that the LORD would raise up a prophet like himself and to Him we must listen, Jesus.)*<sup>57</sup> *May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. (Just as the LORD said to us, "I will never leave you or forsake you.")*<sup>58</sup> *May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations he gave our fathers.* (We need Him to turn our hearts, not only the written word, but to the still small voice of His Spirit in our hearts.)<sup>59</sup> *And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, (Surely He does meet our need daily in Jesus, Phil 4:19)*<sup>60</sup> *so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. (That is the fruit of our walking in Him.)*<sup>61</sup> *But your hearts must be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.*" (The world will know IF our hearts are fully committed to Him, watching and listening for His direction.)

May He turn our hearts toward Him, and may they be fully committed to the LORD our God in an ever-increasing way!