

26-0823p - Detailed Summary

26-0823p - *A Bond Servant*, Steve Cain

Bible Reader: John Nousek

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A Bond Servant

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reading (0:04 - 0:54): John Nousek

Titus 1:1-3: John reads the evening Scripture from Titus chapter 1, the first three verses. The passage presents Paul as a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life

Continued

which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago. At the proper time God manifested His word in the proclamation with which Paul was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior. The reading closes with “Amen.”

Summary of Transcript (0:04 - 49:07), Preacher: Steve Cain

(0:59-5:18) Introduction to the Theme and Romans 6 on Slavery to Sin or Righteousness

Steve opens by stating that the message he desires to bring tonight is probably his hobby. It is a lesson very difficult for him to understand sufficiently in order to live it. He attributes this difficulty to the way he and the congregation were raised in the community's education system, which is essentially the Roman and Greek education system. That system shapes how people think about living, what they need to do, and how to achieve it—chiefly by pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. While that approach is sometimes necessary, most of the time people forget God's divine intervention and involvement in their lives.

The Titus passage was chosen with purpose. In the version John read (apparently the New American Standard), Paul identifies himself as a bondservant of God. The subject of the lesson is therefore what it means to be servants and how that reality is to be applied. Every person is a servant either to God or to Satan; Paul makes that clear in Romans chapter 6. When believers became Christians they deliberately chose to become servants of God. Steve turns to Romans 6 and reads from the New International Version. Paul asks, “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” The answer is “By no means.” When a person offers himself to someone as an obedient slave, he becomes the slave of the one he obeys—whether a slave to sin, which leads to death, or a slave to obedience, which leads to righteousness. Thanks be to God that although the readers used to be slaves to sin, they have now come to obey from the heart the pattern of teaching that has claimed their allegiance. They have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. Thus believers are slaves to righteousness, that is, to God.

(5:18-9:23) God's Ongoing Care and the Plantation-Slave Analogy

Steve recalls that in the morning lesson he pointed out that God is not derelict in taking care of His creation. The same point is central tonight: as slaves, believers need to recognize that God will not let them go to poverty or simply flounder. When Steve was growing up, a major question was whether God continues to be involved in the world or whether He wound it up, set it going, and then stepped back to let it evolve on its own. The answer is that God divinely intervenes; He did not sit back and say, "Do your own thing." Psalm 104 shows that God looks after His creation in every way.

Steve then invites the congregation to think in terms of the American plantation slave who picked cotton, planted rice, or tended fruit trees. While attending preaching school in Louisiana for two years he visited many plantations and had his eyes opened to the relationship between owners and slaves. Sometimes plantation owners married slaves or had children by them; it was even possible for a slave to end up owning a plantation through such a relationship. If the owner's own heirs proved derelict while a slave proved strong and responsible, that slave might share in the inheritance. Nevertheless, slaves remained chattel property. If they escaped, the owner could pursue them at all costs and bring them back. The slave was expected to work the fields—planting and picking cotton and performing whatever other labor the owner required. Christians likewise are obligated to God and must deal with their own "sweat equity."

(9:23-16:59) God's Expectations from Eden through the Noahic Covenant

When Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, God took care of them completely; they lacked nothing. Yet He expected them to tend and keep the garden. In the same way God expects humanity to go into the world, subdue it, and carry out the work of discovering cures, extracting minerals, learning to fly, caring for animals, and countless other tasks. God wants people to do these things.

Steve turns to Genesis 9 to show what God expected of Noah after the flood. This chapter contains what he calls the Nordic (Noahic) Law, under which people lived until the Mosaic Law. God blessed Noah and his sons and commanded them to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth. At the Tower of Babel the people refused that command; they preferred to settle in one place and build a city and a tower for their own glory rather than go out and subdue the earth. God therefore confused their language. Returning to Genesis 9, Steve continues reading: the fear and dread of mankind would fall on every beast, bird, and creature; everything that lives and moves would be food for them, just as the green plants had been given earlier. They were not to eat meat with its lifeblood still in it. God would demand an accounting for human blood from both animals and humans; whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall his blood be shed, for God made mankind in His own image. Again the command is given to be fruitful and multiply on the earth. God then establishes His covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature that came out of the ark: never again would all life be destroyed by a flood. The rainbow in the clouds is the sign of that everlasting covenant. Whenever the rainbow appears, God will remember His covenant. This Noahic arrangement is what governed life until Moses.

(16:59-20:18) The Master's Care for His Slaves and God's Care for His People

God has never left His people alone; He continues to meet their needs. Paul wants believers to recognize the same truth he himself learned: he quit living as he had under the Jewish religion and, as a Christian, became completely reliant upon God to take care of him one hundred percent. Jesus likewise calls people to the point where God is their Master and they are His servants.

Steve returns to the plantation analogy. The master looked after his slaves just as carefully as he looked after his cattle, horses, and livestock. When slaves became sick he called a physician; on large plantations he even hired a resident physician. Owners also recognized the need for education and hired teachers to instruct the children who were too young or too feeble to work in the fields. Intelligent slaves were further educated so they could conduct business for the owner; the surrounding community recognized such a slave as an authorized representative of the plantation. In the same way, if believers are slaves of God, and God is not derelict in caring for the rest of His creation, He certainly is not derelict in caring for them. He will look after them and meet their needs. Paul learned to rely on God for exactly that provision.

(20:18-25:34) Paul's Tent-Making and Reliance on God in 2 Corinthians 1

As far as employment is concerned, Paul was a tent-maker. Making tents could bring a good profit, yet how many tents he actually made is unknown. He was able to meet some of his personal needs by his trade, but many times he served the churches free of charge as a way of giving to God and promoting the gospel. Steve turns to a passage he loves in 2 Corinthians. After some searching he settles on chapter 1. He first reads from verse 18 onward about God's faithfulness and the "yes" that is found in Christ, then backs up to verse 12 about conducting themselves with integrity and godly sincerity, relying not on worldly wisdom but on God's grace. Finally he returns to verses 8–11. Paul does not want the Corinthians uninformed about the troubles he and his companions experienced in Asia. They were under pressure far beyond their ability to endure and even despaired of life itself, feeling they had received the sentence of death. This happened so that they might not rely on themselves but on God who raises the dead. God delivered them from that deadly peril and will deliver them again. Their hope is that He will continue to deliver them as the Corinthians help by their prayers, so that many will give thanks for the gracious favor granted in answer to those prayers. Paul is explaining that although he had planned to come to Corinth, circumstances prevented him; he and his companions had undergone a severe trial that forced them to depend wholly on God.

(25:35-32:52) Steve's Personal Testimony of Financial Crisis and Divine Provision

Steve asks the congregation to indulge him as he shares a personal experience that helps him appreciate the truth he is teaching. Many years earlier, around 1965–1970, he lived in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with his wife and three small children. He had moved from one job to another—selling cars, selling insurance, and other work—always looking for the "golden egg." He spent all his money and savings and fell behind on the house payments. One night he was so distraught he could not sleep. While the family slept, he lay on the front-room floor, buried his face, and cried out to God for help, knowing that one more call from a creditor could push him into bankruptcy. After praying he went to bed with his wife.

The next morning the newspaper arrived with the usual want-ads. Coca-Cola had just come off a

strike and was hiring driver-salesmen. Steve put on a suit, went to apply, and was shocked to find he was the only man in the room wearing a suit. The interviewer told him that if he could obtain a chauffeur's license (the forerunner of today's CDL) he would be hired. Steve ran to the license bureau, took the written test without studying, and passed it, missing fewer than the three questions that would have failed him. He returned with the license, was hired on the spot, and was given discarded uniform pieces to wear. He was then paired with a huge, tough, red-haired man from the roughest part of Chicago and ordered to help unload an entire truck of 16-ounce Coca-Cola cases by hand—cases weighing fifty-five pounds each. Steve, who had never lifted anything heavier than a pencil, struggled to stack them five high while his partner worked rapidly. The next morning his hands were so sore he could barely open them, yet he continued. Later he learned the other drivers had placed bets on how long he would last. Six years later he was completely solvent and owed no one. At that point the opportunity came to attend the school of preaching, and his wife Mary, who until then had not wanted to be a preacher's wife, consented. Steve attributes the entire turnaround to God's divine intervention and providence; without it he would not believe as he does.

(32:52-34:29) Linking the Testimony to Paul's Experience of Despair and Deliverance

Steve draws the parallel directly to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians. Paul found himself in a situation he could not handle, a crisis so severe that he and his companions felt they had received the sentence of death. In those days a man without work and with companions depending on him faced the real possibility of the poor farm. Paul states that the trial happened so they would not rely on themselves but on God who raises the dead. God delivered them from the deadly peril and would deliver them again; their hope was set on Him, and the prayers of the churches would bring thanksgiving for the gracious favor granted. Steve says the passage means an awful lot to him because of what he himself experienced. What Paul and God want believers to know is that God is not derelict in taking care of His creation. Human beings are His creation—essentially like His pets—and He is obligated to look after them and meet their needs.

(34:29-37:00) Jesus' Teaching in Matthew 6: Do Not Worry

Steve turns to another of his favorite passages, Matthew 6:25 and following, reading from the New International Version. Jesus commands, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?" He points to the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor store in barns, yet the heavenly Father feeds them. Believers are of far greater value. Worry cannot add a single hour to life. The flowers of the field neither labor nor spin, yet not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass that is here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, will He not much more clothe His people of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" The pagans run after these things, but the heavenly Father already knows the needs of His children. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given as well. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Steve returns to the plantation analogy: the owner looked after his slaves in every practical way. Believers are God's slaves. According to Romans 6 they are bond-slaves to the one to whom they yield themselves. Having made the choice to belong to God, they may rest in the knowledge that He continues to look after them.

(37:00-42:28) Philippians 4 and the Secret of Contentment

To put the “icing on the cake,” Steve turns to another favorite passage, Philippians 4, beginning at verse 10. He observes that people often place too much weight on themselves, wanting things they do not have and then, when they ask, seeking to lavish those things on themselves—exactly the problem James addresses. From his own years at International Harvester, where he earned the equivalent of what many foreign workers make today and belonged to the union, Steve notes the common tendency to spend whatever is earned rather than to save, continually raising one’s lifestyle to match income. God, however, calls people to settle for the basics: not a fabulous house or car, but the simple necessities. Because people refuse that counsel they become burdened with the cares of the world. Paul learned to live with the basics. Steve asks the congregation to consider Jesus Himself: what did He do to earn wages or pay His way? His needs were met, often through the support of others. Paul, once he left Judaism and gave himself to the gospel, likewise had his needs supplied.

Reading Philippians 4:10–13, Paul rejoices that the Philippians have renewed their concern for him. He is not speaking out of need; he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances. He knows what it is to be in need and what it is to have plenty. He has learned the secret of being content in any and every situation—whether well-fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want. “I can do all this through Him who strengthens me.” Steve remarks that the familiar phrase sometimes bothers him because it is often misapplied. Properly understood, it means that through Christ’s strength a person can endure the very trials and traumas he has just described—unemployment, looming house payments, family pressure—and still make it through. Believers can live through their problems knowing that God strengthens them, meets their needs, and works through divine intervention, providence, and preservation. Steve, now eighty-five years old and living on Social Security, has learned to be content with paying rent, buying food, and purchasing gasoline to travel to and from the assembly.

(42:28-45:29) Paul’s Thanksgiving and God’s Promise to Meet Needs

Paul continues by thanking the Philippians for sharing in his troubles. In the early days of their acquaintance with the gospel, when he left Macedonia, no other church shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving except the Philippians; even while he was in Thessalonica they sent aid more than once. He does not desire the gift itself so much as the credit that accrues to their account. He has received full payment and more than enough; the gifts brought by Epaphroditus are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God. Then comes the great assurance: “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus.” Steve asks whether the congregation can bring themselves to believe that promise. The reason many struggle is that they do not truly view themselves as God’s servants. If they are His servants, He will look after them—exactly what Paul is pointing out.

(45:29-49:07) The Decision to Be God’s Servant and the Gospel Invitation

Steve presses the question: do believers really view themselves as God’s servants? Paul did; he behaved as one who belonged to God, promoted God, and did God’s business. The opportunity and encouragement to make that decision are found back in Romans 6. Thanks be to God that although the readers used to be slaves to sin, they have come to obey from the heart the pattern of teaching that claimed their allegiance. That pattern is the gospel: God so loved the world that He gave His

only begotten Son; He does not desire that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Through mercy and grace He has extended the opportunity to leave Satan and his ways and become His child. Jesus made it possible. A person must become a disciple of Jesus, put Him on in baptism, and let Jesus pay the debt that no one else can pay—the debt of being a sinner, a lawbreaker. John defines sin as the breaking of the law; the penalty is death, as God warned in the beginning, “In the day that you eat of it you shall die.” God sent Jesus to die on the cross, paying that debt in the sinner’s place. Jesus can die no more; as long as a believer walks in the light as He is in the light, His blood continues to cleanse from all sin. Steve closes by asking whether anyone present has yet come to Jesus for that cleansing power and extends the invitation to respond while the congregation stands and sings the song of encouragement.