

Servant of God



Privileged to conduct bi-monthly services at a local resident home for the elderly we decided to share thoughts on the eight Beatitudes in Matthew 5, Jesus's "Sermon on the Mount." Our original interest was how these eight blessings impacted our service to the Lord in the face of ridicule, mockery and other forms of persecution. Our research labored under the theory that these eight Beatitudes, from "Poverty of Spirit" to "Peacemaking" were somehow linked in the spiritual development of a follower of Christ. We concluded in addition that the order of the Beatitudes is not incidental but an undeniable example of the divine genius in preparing each believer for divine service. Research into the various words used in Matthew's recollection support this approach.

What didn't seem as obvious at first was how these eight Beatitudes (eight beautiful attitudes) represented the heart of a servant of God and in the process prepared them and qualified them for *the kingdom of heaven*—referenced twice in these few verses.

God's grace, according to this text—is the claim here—is at work in the life of every believer

preparing them to “*inherit the earth., see God, and be called the children of God.*” In another, Pauline, sense we are being prepared for *citizenship* in heaven¹ and as the *Bride of Christ*.²

Terms like *meekness, mourning, hungering and thirsting for righteousness*, and the hapax legomenos³ *peacemakers* require a close—not casual—look if this prima-facie idea is correct. It only remains to make the logical link between now and when, between the work God is perfecting in us in this life⁴ and how it relates to the life to come.⁵

Lastly, this work becomes a study of words based on the strong fundamental belief that every word is inspired. Yet scholarship has long recognized the limitation on some biblical terms

¹ Philippians 3:20 *our citizenship is in heaven.*

² 2 Corinthians 11:2 *I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.* compare; Revelation 19:7 *...his bride has made herself ready.*

³ found only here in Scripture.

⁴ Matthew 4:17 *From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”*

⁵ Matthew 8:11 *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

to do justice to what God is introducing to us.⁶

Professor R. C. Trench, lecturing on the importance of the study of language in the history of thought, remarked,

“...words often contain a witness for great moral truths — God having impressed such a seal of truth upon language, that men are continually uttering deeper things than they know...”⁷

Words do bear witness to truth even if imperfectly since God’s thoughts are elevated above our humble ability to grasp them. We have only begun to learn Truth which is eternal. We are

⁶ Dr. Milligan writes in his Introduction to *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, *Alike in Vocabulary and Grammar the language of the New Testament exhibits striking dissimilarities from Classical Greek; and in consequence it has been regarded as standing by itself as “New Testament Greek.” In general it had been hastily classed as “Judaic” or “Hebraic” Greek; its writers being Jews (with the probable exception of Saint Luke), and therefore using a language other than their own, a language filled with reminiscences of the translation-Greek of the Septuagint on which they had been nurtured.*

It is an endless debate among scholars as to the meanings of some words in the New Testament, whether they are more classical in meaning or somehow carry a special nuanced significance under divine inspiration.

⁷ Richard Trench. *On the Study of the Words Lectures* (New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 56.

students more than scholars of all God provides and only beginning by an active faith to comprehend what the natural mind cannot grasp. So we begin first with a look at some biblical terms that have relevance to our understanding of our inheritance in the saints.

The thought promoted here is that only the servant's heart can thrive spiritually during persecution. But more so, this is the type of citizen which inherits the blessings of heaven.

Paul, A Servant of God

You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master.... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.⁸

Jesus is our Savior and Lord and if He is our Lord, we are His servants. If we are His servants, we listen and follow Him. But this simple definition of service is incomplete for two

⁸ John 13:13-17

reasons. One, Jesus calls us friends.⁹ We are more than servants, even while we remain His servants.¹⁰ Additionally, this servant-friend relationship, we contend in this work, describes also our heavenly relationship with God. This relationship continues through eternity?¹¹

So we are servant-friends which made me wonder if the words used for servant/slave in the New Testament are adequate to describe this relationship. Paul called himself, the Lord's *slave* — *he used the word "slave"* — not because God required his commitment to the ministry of reconciliation which he trumpeted but because *His heart required it!*

Paul, a servant [slave] of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ to further the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness¹²

⁹ John 15:15 *I no longer call you servants, ... Instead, I have called you friends...*

¹⁰ 2 timothy 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.*

¹¹ Revelation 19:10 *I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

¹² Titus 1:1

A brief study of the terms used in the New Testament will suffice to make this point.

Slave

Some servants are enslaved (slaves) and have no choice but to execute given service for their ruler. Such an obligation was often self-imposed upon the believer's heart.¹³ Such service defines a servile *relationship* with a Master. If we are God's slaves, we are obligated to obey, but does this effectively represent the relationship the Lord has with His saints. The word carries the notion or nuance of compulsory, enforceable, service. Our heavenly relationship starting in this life is based on willing service. This is the main message behind *grace*: against such there is no law.¹⁴

Servant

The Bible does have another word for a servant whose service is *voluntary*. A slave might

¹³ Romans 1:1 *Paul, a **servant** of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. Compare: Acts 4:20 As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*

¹⁴ Galatians 5:23

be a servant, but not all servants are enslaved. Some serve freely. Some service “*may be used of the physician’s watchful tendance of the sick, man’s service of God, and is beautifully applied by Xenophon (Mem. iv. 3. 9) to the care which the gods have of men.*”¹⁵ Moses, for example, served¹⁶ God *voluntarily*, but as scholarship is won’t to point out, his service was more like an *administrator* of God’s affairs. Joseph might have served Pharaoh in this way, which is honorable. But in the kingdom of heaven service is more than voluntary. Somehow in this divine context there is a harmony in God’s relationship to His saints. They are living in sync with His great heart.¹⁷

¹⁵ Richard Trench, “Synonyms of the New Testament,” p. 31

¹⁶ Hebrew 3:5 “*Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house.*” Moses a servant in the house of God ... implies that he occupied a more confidential position, that a freer service, a higher dignity was his, than that merely of a slave, approaching more closely to that of an [administrator of God’s affairs] in God’s house; and, referring Num. 12: 6-8, we find, confirming this view, that a exceptional dignity is there ascribed to Moses, lifting him above other [“servants”] of God;

¹⁷ Biblical terms that represent service begin here to show the flaw in human understanding behind their definitions and uses. In addition, the use of the concept of free service in biblical language was often confused with servile service. The distinction between voluntary and obligatory became blurred.

Scholarship tells us:

They [We] are as Jesus was, on the earth, **at once His free and submissive** agents, the depositories of His holiness, the bearers of His love, the interpreters of His wisdom throughout the boundless spaces. ... The meaning is ... that every member of this glorified society has no longer anything in him which is not penetrated by God....¹⁸

John clothes this truth in terms of our love of God.

In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,¹⁹

Minister

Perhaps instead of calling saints God's servants, we might say saints *minister* to the needs and interests of their Lord and King. But even here the word does not go far enough to point out the closeness between the Lord and His people. The Biblical term "minister" suggests service of a particular kind, an area in which a servant worked to please his or her master. Performing

¹⁸ Godet in his Epistle to the First Corinthians, 374

¹⁹ I John 5:3

certain tasks was expected of them. Ministry limits itself to those responsibilities particularly assigned. We sometimes refer to such servants as *deacons* after the biblical term.²⁰ Such a servant has their focus on a particular duty. Unlike the word, *servant* already described, a deacon or minister in this regard is more mindful of the *task* at hand and not specifically the person for whom they perform it. It is fulfilling a duty rather than in a more general sense serving their Lord. ...as when my wife has me empty the dishwasher and put the clean dishes away. I had to be told. It is more about dishes than a loving sensitivity about her interests. In another sense: it is more about one's office than one's calling—more descriptive of what they do proficiently than who they do it for in a caring relationship with a leader.

Interestingly, in the parable of the Marriage Supper in Matthew's Gospel²¹ the servants who

²⁰ Colossians 1:23 *if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

²¹ Matthew 22:2-14

invite guests to the feast are called slaves,²² in the same sense Paul felt obligated, not because our Lord is a severe despot but because their devotion or dedication to their Lord required them to answer the call and comb the streets to find others who might come and fill the banquet hall. But the man without the wedding garment²³ was escorted out of the feast, *not* by these same “slaves” or servants.²⁴ Instead, *ministering angels* [our word: ministers] served in that regard to execute the king’s judgment. In modern terms, these were God’s assigned bouncers. Ministering angels are faithful to their chosen assignments.²⁵

Domestics

There remains yet 2 other terms for service. Some servants or “slaves” were specifically known as “household” or domestic servants.²⁶

²² Matthew 22: 3, 4, 8, 10

²³ Matthew 22:13

²⁴ Scholarship called them the ambassadors of Christ

²⁵ compare: Job 1:6 *One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD,*

²⁶ Acts 10:7 NLT *As soon as the angel was gone, Cornelius called two of his **household servants** and a devout soldier, one of his personal attendants.*

Such slaves along with their families were no doubt closer to the master of the house. The weakness in this term should be obvious: God is no respecter of persons.²⁷ If any are to be considered household servants of the Lord, all are His household servants. There is a closer relationship defined in this level of servitude but not because they are more loved but because the value of their duties to their master is more immediately obvious.

...you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.²⁸

A curious use of this term comes from Luke's gospel and the word "serve" here speaks to this very personal level of devotion between a person and his or her purse/money.

No one can **serve** two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.²⁹

²⁷ Acts 10:34

²⁸ Ephesians 2:19

²⁹ Luke 16:13

If we were slaves to money the relationship would suggest an addiction, but the emphasis here is a devoted interest, a more worried involvement, something we think about constantly and dream about nightly. This is a perfect description of “greed.” Perhaps, the picture painted here is of a scrooge sitting at their desk reviewing their investments and counting their profits. Some treat their personal wealth as their god; they are money’s household servants!

Helper

One final term is best translated, *helper*. John Mark was said to be one who ministered to Paul and Barnabas.³⁰ The NIV translation not incorrectly sees him as their “*helper*” Such a minister or servant or helper tends to hold a recognized position in relation to a master. They exercise a limited sphere of service as defined by the need or requirements of whomever they serve.

There is not much here to suggest heavenly

³⁰ Acts 13:5 *John was with them as their helper.*

service or our heavenly relationship with the Lord as His servant-friends.

Christian Service

In all of these words: *a servant does not know his master's business*. Servanthood must never be confused with friendship ...until Jesus redefines it in His relationship with His disciples:

I no longer call you servants, 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.³¹

One thing was true of all servants. Their knowledge of their Lord's motives or interests seemed limited to the specific duties they attended to. This changes in the kingdom of heaven. Citizens in heaven become friend-servants, friends who enjoy the freedom of an ongoing relationship and friendship with their Lord while retaining the servant's heart, the robe of righteousness, which they donned on entering there.

³¹ John 15:15

Friendship with God

For since our **friendship with God** was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.³²

This level of friendship which God has established is now possible because in glory we will have reached, as Paul wrote, “[the] *unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*”³³

In this life, we need Jesus’s constant and prayerful attention to our many spiritual needs while the tempter and accuser roams the land. Jesus has a ministry of intercession for us³⁴ and to fulfil this ministry He has been given authority by the Father “*over all things ... for the benefit of the church ... which is his body,*”³⁵”

Not without meaning Paul confronts heretical ideas that we might need more than Jesus in this

³² Romans 5:10 [NLT]

³³ Ephesians 4:13

³⁴ Romans 8:34 *Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.*

³⁵ Ephesians 1:22 [NLT]

effort. Paul argues with undeniable conviction that Christ, was *“the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*³⁶

In Glory, however, Christ’s ministry of intercession will necessarily cease. So, Jesus will then relinquish to the Father the authority He had as an intercessor. God, the Father, will then become *“all in all.”* He will exercise sole authority, sole supremacy, over all.

... when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. ...And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, **that God may be all in all.**³⁷

The saints become *“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ”*³⁸ Professor Godet interprets all this to mean: *“sharing the divine inheritance...the possession of God, Himself. He is no longer a king surrounded by His servants.”*³⁹ We are servant-

³⁶ Ephesians 1:23 [ESV]

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

³⁸ Romans 8:17

³⁹ Godet in his Epistle to the First Corinthians, 371

friends.

We need to further study this promised and prophesied relationship between the believer and the Lord. In simplest terms, we have become like Christ,

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.⁴⁰

...that Christ "... *might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*"⁴¹ Because we will be like Him we will share in the same relationship with the Father that Jesus knows. Godet concludes, "*God is all in them [the saints] in the same way as he was and is all in his glorified son.*"⁴²

We call it heaven.

⁴⁰ 1 John 3:2

⁴¹ Romans 8:29

⁴² Godet, *Epistle to the First Corinthians*, 371