

Trust and Obey

(Matthew 18:23-34)

I. Introduction

- A. One events snowed out last week end was *WinterJam* Christian music concert
1. This tour of popular Christians bands is really aim at students, at teens
 - a. Last year, went to hear *MercyMe* and were introduced to bands like *Skillet*
 - b. That was like going to hear Barry Manilow and getting Led Zepplin!
 2. The event is as much church service as concert—collection and preaching
 - a. And there will also be an altar call—invitation for people to accept Jesus
 - 1) No mention of baptism or even church (*follow-up is left to youth minister*)
 - 2) There's big push for kids to accept Christ, make decision, get saved
 - b. Get saved at these big events is easy —raise hand, say prayer, fill a card
 - c. Maybe this artificial revival atmosphere makes “*getting saved*” too easy?
(*friend in Promise Keepers observed that every rally, same people were getting saved*)
 3. There can be more emphasis on getting saved than living as saved people
- B. Some see any emphasis at all on obedience as somehow compromising grace
1. Paul warns us about “Cheap Grace,” stressing grace without discipleship
 - a. There were people at Rome who saw grace as a license to sin (**3:8, 6:1**)
“*Let us do evil that good may result.*” “*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*”
 - b. Some at Corinth were so grace-oriented they ignored incest (**1 Cor 5:2**)
 - c. Paul tell Galatians, “*Do not use freedom to indulge the sinful nature*” (**5:13**)
 2. Many reject what they “*Lordship Salvation.*” They see this as heresy
 - a. Here how one defines this so-called “*heresy.*” *Does this sound heretical?*
“*A person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority*”
 - b. If you accept God's grace in Christ, ALL you have to do is to accept Jesus
 - c. And it doesn't matter if you stop accepting Jesus—if you believe once
Believers who become agnostics are still saved; they are still born again. You can even become atheist; but if you once accept Christ as savior, you cannot lose your salvation, even though you deny God
 3. You can see why there is such emphasis place on altar call, getting saved
 - a. Once you raise a hand, say a prayer or fill in a card, then ticket is punched
 - b. We are saved by grace—so it really doesn't matter if we do good works
 4. Yesterday's reading in **Matthew 18** reminds us that grace OBLIGATES

II. The Obligation of Grace: THEN (Matthew 18:23-27)

- A. **Simple Story:** Man owes the king millions, the earnings of thousand lifetimes
1. How did he run up such a bill? *Uses same account our government uses?*
 - a. Point is he can't pay, and king orders him and family sold. *That's the law*
 - b. But the man begs, pleads and promises, and the king is moved to mercy
 - c. What man could not repay in 1000 lifetimes, the king simply forgives.
 2. Sound familiar? God paid a debt that we could NEVER pay. GRACE!
 - a. Because of the cross, we skip from God's throne room free and forgiven
 - b. **Problem:** We want to stop right there and forget the rest of the story!
 3. But there is more to the parable—obligation of grace (Matthew 8:28-31)
- B. A fellow slave who owes the man 100 days wages—a large but payable debt
1. He demands, “*Pay me what you owe me!*” And poor slob doesn't have it.
 - a. And he begs, pleads and promises (*Sound familiar? Why didn't guy see it?*)
 - b. Forgiven refuses to forgive, and he has the man put in debtor's prison
 2. **Important:** First servant is acting within his rights in throwing man in jail
 - a. That what happened to people who did pay— first prison, then slavery
 - b. Actually, there was one other thing that could happen to debtors too.
 3. So if what he did was legal, then why will king call him a “*wicked servant*”
 - a. His action was legal under law, but was unacceptable under grace!
 - b. Because he had experienced grace, he was under an obligation to grace!
 - 1) Because this man received grace, he could NOT just follow the law
 - 2) Grace meant he was expected to act like the king who gave grace!
- C. Free gift meant an **obligation!** The story ends in the throne room (18: 32-34)
1. The servant is call **wicked** because the king's grace didn't change him
 - a. The free gift of grace obligated the servant to act like the king
 - b. And because he didn't, the parable ends with revocation of the gift
 2. This parable is usually called “*The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant*”
 - a. We should just as easily name it “*Parable of the Unchanged Servant*”
 - b. So grace is absolutely free, but it also comes with absolute obligation

III. The Obligation of Grace: NOW

- A. Grace was largely ignored back in Dark Ages... like back when I was in college
1. I was taught (*taught others*) that salvation was pretty brittle and tenuous
 - a. You could quickly lose it by not getting something exactly right
 - b. Being wrong on how you sing, baptize or organize will send you to hell
 - 1) Sister asked, “*Can a woman be saved if she wears pants to church*”
 - 2) She quickly added. “*I mean if she does everything else exactly right*”
 - c. We may have talked about grace, but acted like we’re saved by works
 2. We are saved because Christ died, and not because of anything that we do
 - a. We are saved by grace, through faith— not what we do (**Eph 2:8-9**)
⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.
 - b. Salvation is the free, undeserved gift of a gracious, loving God.
 - c. It is not of us-- not a matter of what we accomplish or figure out
 - 1) If we could do salvation ourselves, God would be happy to let us!
 - 2) Jesus went to the cross because that was the only way to save us!
- B. The danger is when we think of grace only in terms of God’s *throne room*
1. In throne room, King forgave the debt and granted us our freedom
 - a. We don’t stay in the throne room—we have to go out and live
 - b. There’s an obligation of grace; we must go out and live graciously
 - c. Forgiven servant was called wicked when he refused to live grace
 2. It is absurd to suggest one is saved because they once prayed a prayer
 - a. Accepting God’s grace means we are obligated to live graciously
 - b. That obligation is not to achieve an ethical or theological perfection
 - 1) We don’t have to deserve or preserve our salvation by what we do
 - 2) We don’t have to figure out Revelation, Trinity or Cain’s wife!
 3. What we must do when we accept grace is to seek to live it out in real life
 - a. The text that tells us HOW we are saved also tells us WHY (**Eph 2:10**)
¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
 - b. Receiving the grace of God obligates us to living graciously before God

IV. Conclusion

A. We are to treat other people in the same grace God gives to us

1. The context here is **forgiveness**. How often must I forgive? (**Matt 18:21**)
²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times (Footnote: Seventy times seven)
 - a. Peter is being generous—the rabbis required only three strikes
 - b. Peter doubles that requirement and adds one (*7 is a good Bible number*)
 - c. Jesus says, "*If you're going to do math, then don't add—multiply*" (70x7)
2. That is a lot of forgiveness, especially when you remember Jesus' context
 - a. **Process**: What are you to do if your brothers sins against you? (**Mt 18:15ff**)
 - b. You first go privately, then you go a 2nd time with 2-3 others (*mediation*)
 - c. The whole purpose of this process is to "*win your brother over*" (**v. 15**)
3. And you have to do all that 70 times 7 times? *How big of a pain is that?*
 - a. It's not nearly as big a pain as Jesus going to the cross to **forgive you!**
 - b. To accept the grace of the cross, we are obligated to live the life of cross!

B. Where did we get the idea that grace makes things easier than law?

1. I was talking not long ago to someone about involvement or attendance
 - a. I can't remember the topic—small groups, Sun school, Wed nights, etc
 - 1) It is so much harder it is to get us committed to church stuff
 - 2) Everyone is so busy, and church sometimes seems a low priority
 - b. This person said wondered, "*Maybe you preached too much on grace?*"
 - c. Maybe we got the idea somewhere that grace makes things easier on us?
2. Paul, who knew something about grace, had another idea (**1 Cor 15:10**)
But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me
 - a. Grace didn't make discipleship **easier**; grace made discipleship **possible!**
 - b. God's grace that made it possible for Paul to be Paul—"I am what I am"
 - 1) And it was grace that cause him to work harder than anyone. Why?
 - 2) Paul saw an obligation in grace—the forgiven must live forgiven!
3. There's an obligation to grace—"Trust and obey, for there's no other way."