

Serving Our Common Master

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to God in prayer as we prepare to hear from his word. Our God, I ask for a clear mind that what I've prepared to speak may be what is helpful to say.

I ask if there is more that needs to be said beyond what I've prepared, Lord, that your spirit may stir me up to say it. If there is something I've prepared that is not helpful to say, may you hold and restrain my own words.

As for those who hear, I pray God that you may give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to understand. Not just to hear these words spoken, but to understand what they mean, to know how they connect with our lives, to learn how we too can be faithful in serving our common master, no matter what roles you put us in, no matter what our work is that you have given us to do.

Lord God, I ask that your word may work powerfully in us this morning, and that it may accomplish all that you've sent it out to do.

Thank you for its wisdom. Thank you for its guidance and its help. And thank you for how, above all, it points to Jesus Christ as our Lord. Amen.

[1 : 28] Okay, some of you who are listening to this are employers. Some of you are employees. And so I want to talk to employees first and ask this question.

Have you ever worked for a bad boss? Have you ever worked for a bad boss? Some of you who maybe are employers or self-employed may say yes, and that's why I no longer work for a boss. But if you're still an employee or if you have memories of being one, think about this. What made your boss a bad boss? Or correspondingly, if you had a good boss, what made them a good boss? Well, in the past, I have worked as an employee for both good bosses and bad bosses as well. And one of the distinguishing marks of a good boss is that he or she really cares about you as a person. They're eager to cultivate you as an employee. One of the distinguishing marks, on the other hand, of a bad boss is that he or she thinks of you as a cog in the machine, as a stepping stool for their own advancement, and that person is eager to exploit you as an employee.

[2 : 47] They're just trying to get out of you as much as they can. Perhaps you've felt that way in your place of work. Now, let's turn to those of you who are employers.

Have you ever tried to oversee a bad employee? What made that employee a bad worker? Or correspondingly, what makes for a good worker?

One of the distinguishing marks of bad workers is that you have to oversee them constantly because they can't be trusted.

Sometimes they might work well when you're paying attention, but turn your back and you don't know what you're going to get.

Or maybe they turn the relationships in the workplace into relationships of gossip and mistrust and competition. On the other hand, one of the distinguishing marks of good workers is that you can entrust a lot to them.

[3 : 52] They work hard. They work well. You can turn your back, not pay attention, and you know that they are going to do a good job. The relationships in the workplace, they turn, they influence into relationships of trust, relationships of encouraging conversation.

Now, let's take those things that we're talking about. Let's turn inward. Let's consider ourselves. Because we don't want to just look outwards at all of the good bosses, bad bosses, good employees, bad employees out there.

But we want to consider ourselves. How can you become a good employer or a good employee? How can you become either a good boss or a good worker? And I want to do that and not only talk about the workplace, but I want to extend this to other relationships in our lives as well.

Because it's not just in the workplace that we have relationships in which we either exert authority or we serve authority. That happens in many other relationships as well.

How can you lead or serve well in your charity or volunteer work? How can you do it in church ministries? If you're in school, how can you do it as a student at school?

[5 : 16] How can you do it while putting together IKEA furniture with your spouse? If your marriage can survive an IKEA furniture assembly, if you can come out of that with a lot of respect and love for one another, that's a good sign.

Does the gospel of Jesus Christ have something to say about these relationships in which we are exerting authority or serving authority, in which we are trying to work together harmoniously?

Well, the gospel does have a lot to say about that. God's word has something to say about the mindset that drives us to become the kind of person who can lead well and the kind of person who can serve well.

We actually want to be both kinds of people. There is something unique about a person who understands from the heart that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Someone who understands from the heart that we are serving our common master, a master who is in common to all of us. That's what the apostle Paul writes about in Ephesians chapter 6.

[6 : 24] And I'm going to read to you verses 5 through 9. Ephesians chapter 6, verses 5 through 9. Bondservants, 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 bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Now, I'm not sure what translation of the Bible you're reading this in, and depending on what your translation is, verse 5 begins with a word that may be translated variously as, from least offensive to most offensive, as servants, bondservants, or slaves.

Even the English Standard Version I'm reading from originally used the word slaves, and then they changed it to bondservants. It's easy to understand why English translations tend to shy away from using that last word, slaves.

It can bring up a lot of images that may not have been present in the original context. The word slave in our culture, it conjures up images of the Atlantic slave trade.

[8 : 25] Centuries of slavery, centuries of prejudice against men and women of African ancestry, prejudice that even continues today. This brings up a lot of terrible and grievous racial wounds and shame.

And it speaks of a cultural system in which some people are treated as less human than others, in fact, as scarcely human, in fact, as the property of other people.

Given all of these painful offenses, we would do well to consider this question. Why doesn't Paul condemn slavery in these verses?

Why doesn't Paul condemn slavery in these verses? And that's something that I want to take a little bit of time to talk about because I don't want to gloss over that idea, especially in our very political volatile day and age, and especially in a day and age when these are questions that are front and center in our cultural conversation.

But one commentator that I thought really did a good job of summarizing it, a man by the name of Phil Moore, he summarized three sets of reasons why Paul doesn't condemn slavery here.

[9 : 42] There are historical reasons, there are practical reasons, and then there are theological reasons. Historical reasons, practical reasons, and theological reasons.

So first, let's consider the historical reasons why Paul doesn't condemn slavery here. Slavery, historically, it was a common feature across most human cultures prior to the last couple of centuries.

Prior to the discovery of the New World, it was a less common feature in Christian cultures, but in many other cultures, it was far more common. In fact, it was considered unremarkable.

And the same is true in the culture that Paul is writing in, in the Greco-Roman world of the Roman Empire, this vast Roman and Greek culture. Within the context of this world, slavery existed, and it was absolutely enmeshed in the whole way the society functioned.

It was unimaginable not to have slavery. Paul, in this context, in the context of that world, and in the context of Ephesus, Paul chose not to launch a tiny revolution against the institution of slavery. [10:57] Instead, Moore explains the historical reasons that Paul chose to work within the system of slavery, why he chose to write and to work within the system. Paul does not condemn slavery outright for historical reasons.

It is almost impossible for us to utter the word slavery without thinking of the appalling transfer of three million black Africans across the Atlantic between 1492 and 1807.

Roman slavery was very different. Most slaves were prisoners of war. And had they not been enslaved on the battlefield, they would almost certainly have been slaughtered instead.

Whereas black slaves in the New World tended to be slaves for life, most Roman slaves could win their freedom within a decade. That doesn't mean it was right.

But it does mean it is wrong for us to read these verses without being aware of our own cultural baggage. On top of that, here's some more context, some more historical cultural context added by another author.

[12:02] Slavery could take the form of debt slavery, in which people sold themselves or their children to clear their debts, punishment for crime, the birth of children to slaves, and the enslavement of victims of piracy or war.

Slaves in state-owned minds worked under inhumane conditions and had a short life expectancy. Many household slaves, on the other hand, fared better. And I should note that Paul is writing in the context of household slaves because this is part of his household code to wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters.

The source continues. In the Greco-Roman world, owning slaves was not limited to the rich. Many households included at least one slave. The Greeks and Romans both employed a system in which slaves could own property, earn money, and buy their freedom.

This system was probably implemented to keep slaves submissive. I would add on top of these things, too, that the Bible is absolutely unequivocal, both the Old and New Testaments, that those who kidnap people for slaves, those who buy, who take those kidnapped people and try to sell them as slaves, in the Old Testament, that would incur the death penalty.

And Paul specifically lists it as a grave sin in the New Testament as well. If people had been following, paying attention to biblical law, the Atlantic slave trade could never have happened.

[13:38] All of this helps us understand the historical context that Paul is writing in. It's not a good system. I'm not saying this to defend the system at all. It's often not a humane system, but it is a much more complex system, and it is quite different from the racial slavery, the chattel slavery in the Americas that we are so used to thinking about.

So those are historical reasons that influenced Paul's mindset when he was writing this letter to the Ephesians. So let's then consider, second, practical reasons why Paul doesn't condemn slavery in these verses.

There are practical reasons why simply declaring all slaves should be freed, why that would actually be harmful rather than helpful in that context.

Here's what Moore writes about it. Paul does not condemn slavery outright for practical reasons.

Historians cannot agree on the population of first century Ephesus, but some estimate that its 250,000 free citizens were outnumbered by anything up to 400,000 slaves.

Paul is smart enough to see that calling for their immediate emancipation would actually destroy them, since Roman slavery at least ensured that the very rich had a vested interest in providing for the very poor.

[15:07] The Roman orator, Cicero, lamented that conditions for most poor workers were worse than those of slaves, and that the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery.

In other words, those who were free but poor were worse off than slaves. In fact, they themselves might as well have been slaves.

Their plight was so terrible. Given how small the early Christian churches were, given the fact that they were on the margins of society, there was no safety net for freed slaves.

There was no government support. There was no 40 acres of land to give to freed slaves like the United States did in the 1800s. In that world, pronouncing the emancipation of slaves would have left them in a place of utter ruin and probable starvation.

So these are practical reasons that Paul chose to work within the system of slavery in this letter. And then finally, Moore says, Paul does not condemn slavery outright for theological reasons. [16:18] He tells us throughout his letters that unbelievers are slaves to sin and that the gospel frees a person from the inside out. He therefore helps the Ephesian slaves to see that they are freer than their masters if they work as willing slaves of Jesus Christ.

And he helps the Ephesian masters to see that they will only know true freedom if they recognize that they have obligations towards their slaves because they are also slaves of Christ themselves. The 19th century German thinker, Goethe, observed that nobody is more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe that they are free. Nobody is more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe that they are free.

Paul refuses to shortchange the Ephesian slaves with superficial liberty. He teaches them how to be truly free on the inside. So let's take some time to expand on that idea, this truth that all Christians are willing slaves of Jesus Christ, that only through Jesus Christ can we be truly free on the inside.

It is all these theological reasons, these theological priorities that help us become the leaders, the workers that God made us to be in the context of authority and service.

[17:49] So first, let's consider how we honor Christ Jesus from a position of service. We'll first consider how we honor Jesus Christ from a position of service. Here's what Paul writes in Ephesians 6 verses 5 through 8.

Bond servants, 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 bond servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bond servant or is free.

So first, as BK mentioned a couple weeks ago, one thing that is remarkable is that Paul is writing directly to bond servants or slaves.

In the ancient world, it would be expected that Paul would address the master of the household. He would speak to the person in charge.

He wouldn't stoop to speak to slaves. They were too lowly to address. But the beauty of the gospel is that Paul is willing to go low, to get down, to be approachable.

[19:15] He treats even slaves like they are real human beings at his own level. He addresses them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. that was unthinkable in the ancient world.

Notice that Paul is less concerned with the exact duty and status of the bond servant or slave. He is less concerned with exactly what they're doing. He is more concerned with the mindset with which they serve.

What is their mindset? It is not a mindset of I service as people pleasers. So in other words, this isn't someone who is out to capture the boss's eye.

This isn't someone who is out who is motivated to please the boss, to climb the ladder, to gain influence, to get ahead in the world. This is someone who is from the heart working to please a better master.

Paul is telling them in verse 6 that they are in fact bond servants of Christ. This means that their goal deep down is not to please their earthly human masters to make life better for themselves.

[20:32] Their goal is to please their true heavenly master, the one who truly is their master. Paul sets them free by giving them a new and better master.

If you remember a few years ago when we were preaching through the book of Exodus, this is just how the Lord set the Israelites free in the Exodus.

He set them free from their cruel old master Pharaoh and he set them free not merely by taking them out of Egypt, he set them free by giving them a good new master himself.

And you might remember in fact Israel's great problem was that in their hearts they were still in bondage. even in the wilderness, they still treated the Lord as though he was just like their old master Pharaoh.

They still lived in fear, they still withdrew from him, they still even reached a point in the Exodus where they wanted to go back to Egypt, they wanted to go back to their old master. They did not realize how good the Lord really was.

[21 : 36] And so it is for us today, we need to be set free by knowing we have a new and better master. In positions of service, you serve Christ through heartfelt obedience.

In positions of service, you serve Christ through heartfelt obedience. And this is a remarkable teaching. Because outwardly, you're still doing the same things, you're still obeying, but inwardly you are free.

It sets you free from slavery. It gives new meaning and value to the work that you do. In our present day, and maybe you have a job where you feel like a slave. Certainly every job has moments where you feel that way.

And some people are trapped in a job that they desperately don't want to be a part of where there are elements that make it much akin to slavery. Perhaps they are financially cannot escape a horrible and difficult job.

But even within that context, now you have new meaning and value to the work you do as an employee, or perhaps as a volunteer, if you're working in volunteer and charity work, perhaps as a student.

[22 : 51] As Paul puts it in verse seven, you are rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man. He goes even farther in Colossians 1 verse 24, by the way, which we read, which Colossians 3 verse 24, sorry, where he tells bond servants, you are serving the Lord Christ.

You are serving the Lord Christ. Now, wouldn't this transform the work that you do if you knew that even the act of stocking the shelves at the grocery store where you work, even doing that well and with a sincere heart, that in doing that, you are serving Christ.

Wouldn't it make a difference if you knew that you were studying well and hard for a math exam if you were doing it in honor of Christ, your master? Wouldn't it put a spring in your step if you really believe that the volunteer work you do in your church and your community, that it was a way to honor Christ, that you were doing it for a new and much better, much gentler, much more gracious master, someone that you loved and someone that you knew loves you?

And best of all, what if verse 8 really is true? What if it's true that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bond servant or free?

What if no matter your status in society, no matter if you are just stuck, no matter how humble or menial the work that you do, no matter how lousy the pay is?

[24 : 33] What if Jesus Christ is your Lord and your master? What if Jesus, his heart is just bursting and eager to reward you for all of this when he returns?

Wouldn't it be like working a hard, difficult job? God. But there is a great retirement account in eternity that is bursting, just waiting for you.

I'm here to tell you that all of it is true. If you were a Christian, it's true because Jesus Christ, he didn't stay dead on the cross.

That's what makes all of this true. In Ephesians chapter 1, verses 20 and 21, Paul has told us about Jesus Christ. He's told us what God the Father has done for his son Jesus.

He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

[25 : 49] So Jesus Christ, he has been raised from the dead and he has been seated in the heavenly places. So when you're thinking about those in authority over you, remember this, every authority, every power has been subjected to Jesus Christ.

He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. And this means that if you have turned away from ignoring him, if you turned away from rejecting Jesus Christ, if you have repented of your sin against him, if you have instead turned toward him, asked for forgiveness for your sins, entrusted yourself fully to Jesus Christ, if you have done these things, then you belong to him and you belong with him in resurrection life.

You are in Christ. And if this is you, then God has made you alive and free in Christ.

Christ. And God, through Jesus Christ, is ready and eager to give you all that is good for you. All that is truly good for you.

That's why Paul writes in chapter 2, verses 4 through 7, that God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.

[27 : 16] By grace you have been saved. And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

That's what Paul has in mind when he's writing to the slaves of his day. That's the encouragement that he has for them. This is your master, this is your Lord, and this is who you belong with, and you will be with him.

And so God has given every believer a new calling to live for the glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord, to live to do the will of God from the heart.

In fact, Paul then writes in chapter 2, verse 10, for we, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

So we are recreated. We are new creations. We are new and free and alive. We are now able to do the good works that God already planned for us to do, that God put us in our positions in life to do.

[28 : 36] And so if you are a worker, or you're a server, or a student, or a volunteer, or wherever you are, you can please and honor Christ. You can do the good that he has created you to do, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord.

So, how then do you live? Going back to chapter 6, verse 5, Paul explains that you obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling.

Now, that phrase fear and trembling in the Bible, it is almost always used to describe our attitudes, not towards man, but towards God.

Fear and trembling before God. To fear someone is to be just captivated by the power and the significance of that person, and then to obey quickly and readily because your heart is captivated. It is not our earthly masters who are colossal in power and significance. It is not our earthly masters whom we are aiming to please.

[29 : 51] You've been set free from that. It is Christ Jesus, our heavenly master. Verse 5 says that you obey him with a sincere heart, not half-hearted, but full-hearted obedience.

You do your work for your earthly masters with a sincere heart for Christ. Verse 7 says that in your place of work, you render service with a goodwill as to the Lord and not to man.

In positions of service, you serve Christ through heartfelt obedience. So, that's for those who are in positions of service.

What about those who are in positions of authority? Well, in the pagan world of Paul's day, to be in charge meant that you acted like you were in charge.

You made sure everyone knew that you were in charge. You made sure that everyone else respected your status. Oh, that mindset was so prevalent.

[30 : 58] If you doubt that it was prevalent, read 1 and 2 Corinthians and how Paul is just wrestling with the church that is so obsessed with status and how you show your status and how you get other people to respect your status.

And so, if you were a master in that world, if you were in charge, you would never make yourself approachable to a servant or a slave. You would never go down to their level.

You would never stoop so low. What a disgrace that would be. But Jesus Christ, he changed all of this. He changed it all by coming to earth himself, by stooping low.

And he came to earth. He's already stooping low by becoming a human being. He's already God. He becomes a human being as well as God. And he has come to earth in human form.

And so you think, well, at least he must have come as a glorious, triumphant king, as the greatest, most glorious of all human beings. But no, he comes as a baby, as an infant. And then he comes as a lowly, grows up to be a lowly and humble man, gentle and lowly in heart.

[32 : 06] And then in Mark chapter 10, verses 42 through 45, he goes a step further. And here's what he tells his disciples. You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

And the great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant.

And whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Jesus himself took the place of lowest status in society.

A Messiah who is also a criminal, crucified on a cross. And so even the lowliest slave can look to that Son of God crucified and he can say, I am welcome in God's family.

[33 : 22] I too am welcome. There is no one who is too low in status to belong. That in fact, to come to the cross bringing nothing at all, having no merits of your own, is the only way you can come.

Even the lowliest slave is a fellow brother with the loftiest Christian ruler of equal status before God. And even called a brother of Jesus Christ himself.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul calls Jesus the firstborn among many brothers. So Paul puts both slaves and masters on the same level.

He says they are equal in their humanity, equal in their status, equal in their value. When he says in Ephesians 6 verse 8, that whether someone is a slave or free, he will receive his reward from the same Lord.

And then he continues in verse 9. 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.

[34 : 51] So Paul is saying, and he's saying through the Holy Spirit, that masters should do the same to their slaves. What does that mean? It means they should do God's will.

They should do God's will for their slaves. And what is God's will? Well, all you have to do is look at Ephesians chapter 4 and 5. What is it?

It's all of these words that are surrounding me on the stage right now. These words that we have been keeping in mind as we've been going through this household code. It's speaking the truth.

It's not deceiving. It is restraining your anger. Not lashing out.

Not seething against those under you. It is making sure that you are sharing with those in need. It is not withholding wages or ripping off your workers.

[35 : 49] It's paying them what they deserve. It's making sure they are cared for and supplied for. It's knowing them well enough to know what their needs are. It means you've got to know them personally, those who are directly under you.

It's using your talk to build others up. To make them feel valued. To make them feel like human beings. It's being kind.

Tender-hearted. Forgiving. It's refusing to engage in sexually inappropriate jokes or behaviors towards those who work for you.

Those are all things from Ephesians 4 and 5. Wouldn't it be wonderful? I mean, if you've had a good boss, that's exactly what they're like. And isn't it just you enjoy working for them?

Those of you who are in positions of authority, don't you want to be that? Above all, Paul says here in verse 9, stop your threatening.

[36 : 50] You've got to move away from motivating your workers with threats or manipulation. You treat them as fellow human beings. You treat them as valuable people created in God's image.

In positions of authority, you serve Christ through heartfelt humility. In positions of authority, you serve Christ through heartfelt humility.

And if your workers are brothers or sisters in Christ, you do so all the more. He who is both their master and yours is in heaven.

And there is no partiality with him. In Jesus' eyes, we are all on the same level playing field. We are serving our common master.

Jesus will not be playing favorites with those who are in charge. Jesus will not be playing favorites with those who have a bigger bank account. Jesus will not be playing favorites with those who have a more impressive resume.

[37 : 53] In Galatians 3 verse 28, Paul writes, There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is no male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.

So, since both slave and free are all one in Christ Jesus, what do you do for one another? Well, in the context Paul's writing, you treat your slave as a brother if he is a fellow believer.

You treat him like a brother. Not as a lowly underling, but as your dearly loved brother or sister.

Gavin Ortlund explains that the implications of this teaching, it actually made a huge difference in the whole history of the church, particularly after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West.

Paul dissolves the slave-master relationship and erects in its place a brother-brother relationship in which the former slave is treated with all the dignity that the apostle himself would be treated.

Thus, even before the actual institution of slavery is abolished, the work of the gospel abolishes the assumptions and prejudices that make slavery possible.

[39 : 19] It would make all the difference in our culture and in our churches if this were the mindset that we adopted towards one another, regardless of race, regardless of occupation, regardless of social status.

Paul's teaching spelled the beginning of the end to slavery among God's people. Phil Moore, he added to this, Paul therefore taught slaves to experience true freedom while still slaves.

But he also sowed the seeds for the eventual overthrow of slavery in years to come. When people saw the godly character of Christian slaves, they began to take Paul seriously when he argued that the slave trade was evil, 1 Timothy 1.10, that slaves should gain their freedom if they could, 1 Corinthians 7.21, that masters ought to view their slaves as equals, Ephesians 6.9 and Galatians 3.28, and that they ought to set them free at the proper time, Philemon verse 16.

Although governments resisted his teaching for many years, the historian Rodney Stark argues that Paul's teaching eventually won the day. Of all the world's religions, including the three great monotheisms, only in Christianity did the idea develop that slavery was sinful and must be abolished.

Although it has been fashionable to deny it, anti-slavery doctrines began to appear in Christian theology, soon after the decline of Rome, and were accompanied by the eventual disappearance of slavery in all but the fringes of Christian Europe.

[40 : 55] When Europeans subsequently instituted slavery in the New World, they did so over strenuous papal opposition, a fact that was conveniently lost from history until recently.

Finally, the abolition of New World slavery was initiated and achieved by Christian activists. And none of this would be possible without the belief that all human beings are created in the image of God.

And Christians of all people must understand that our fellow believers are our brothers. How can we possibly treat them as our inferiors?

And I want you to think about that, not merely in the context of racism and slavery. I want you to think about that in the context of the people that you know, the people you interact with on a daily basis, and those who belong to our church, those in your workplace.

How can we treat them as inferiors? In positions of authority, you serve Christ through heartfelt humility. The message of hope that Jesus brings is that someday we will all be judged and rewarded by Jesus Christ.

[42 : 06] On that day, you will not be judged on the basis of your status in society. You will not be judged on what wage you earn or how far you climbed the corporate ladder and whether you gained success and all your dreams came true.

On that day, we will all stand facing the Lord Jesus Christ. And we will all be at the same level before him. We will all be sharing the same hope. We will all be alive and free in the power of the same spirit.

There is an equality of status when we stand before Christ in judgment. But what about the here and now? What about in this time while we await that moment?

And while we await that coming eternity in the new heavens and new earth? How do we live free in the present? How do you live free when you're stuck in a difficult and stressful place of work?

Fillmore tells the story of a man he knew who was in just exactly this position. My good friend Nathan discovered the transforming message of these verses a few years ago.

[43 : 19] He worked for a small business which was in serious trouble. His boss responded by cutting everybody's wages while expecting them to work harder than ever. Nathan applied for other jobs but was unsuccessful in all his interviews.

And he began to feel as much like a slave as any of the original recipients of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It was a real act of sacrifice to Jesus that he guarded his heart towards his boss.

6 verse 5 and kept working hard for him even when he was not looking over his shoulder. Verse 6 It was an act of faith for him to work for Jesus as his true employer.

Verse 7 Believing that Jesus would reward him fairly even if his boss didn't. Verse 8 Then one of Nathan's work colleagues was diagnosed with cancer.

Although he was not a Christian he had been so impressed with Nathan's attitude at work that he turned to him in his hour of crisis. Nathan was able to help him to prepare for death first at the photocopying machine and then later at the hospital.

[44 : 34] When Nathan preached at his colleague's funeral he was able to tell the man's widow and children how he led him to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ before he died.

Shortly afterwards Nathan found a better job. But when he looks back on that year he says he would not have been freed early for any other job in the world.

Because he learned to live as a free man though chained to a desk he hated he was able to lead a fellow slave to freedom through the gospel. That is who we are.

Even if we are slaves we live in freedom through the gospel. And we are calling out to others to join us in our freedom. We are all one church.

We are all one family. We are serving our common master the Lord Jesus Christ. God our Father I thank you. Lord there has been much progress in our world to end evil institutions.

[45 : 41] but our culture has no answers and no help for those who are in the present stuck. No answers other than anger rage resentment.

No answers other than for those in authority in such relationships keeping those below you down maintaining your position of power. I thank you Lord that the gospel offers a better way a way of reformation a way in which we learn how to serve the Lord Jesus Christ from a sincere heart that we are set free and that that internal freedom that freedom that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings us begins to erode and undermine the foundations of evil in our culture in a way that in a way that rage in a way that resentment in a way that bitterness never can or in a way that bitterness a rage and resentment can but leaves horrible destruction for generations in its wake.

Lord God this is the good way of Jesus Christ a way of peace a way of fear of the Lord that exceeds and overcomes the fear of man a way of gentleness and kindness and it is all made possible because you raised your son Jesus Christ from the dead and I ask that anyone who is listening to this may believe that you raised him from the dead may learn to entrust themselves to him and fear him and honor him and glorify him and that we may live for Jesus Christ to him be the glory forever amen and scribe him