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2 And a certain centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. 3 And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. 4 And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue." 6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; 7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 "For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." 10 And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Last week there were congressional hearings on reparations for the descendents of slaves. Wednesday, the 19th of June was the 154th anniversary of the 1865 emancipation of slaves in our nation.

Slavery in our nation is a wound that never heals. And it's a topic I would usually not address on purpose. Emotions run high. And there is much error that causes harm. It's not a discussion I go looking for.

But isn't it interesting that we finished chapter 6 talking about slavery. And the story in Chapter 7:1 - 10 is about a slave. In fact the Bible doesn't broach the subject or apologize for the fact of slavery.

That troubles people, and in fact it can cause a weak christian that is particularly sympathetic to social justice causes to be confused at best and doubt the veracity of scripture at worst. What do we do with that.

Let me speak to that for a moment or two as a bit of a sidebar that may help you in not just that issue, but perhaps other issues also of human oppression that the Bible doesn't seem to be overly sympathetic about.

In Matthew 19 we have a parallel situation in a way. The Pharisee's are trying to trip up Jesus, and they ask Him about divorce. And you can just imagine their glee as He responds with the book answer. They felt he was falling right into their trap as planned.

Mt. 19:3 And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5 and said, 'FOR THIS CAUSE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, AND SHALL CLEAVE TO HIS WIFE; AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6 "Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

They're thinking, now we've got Him; and they respond to scripture with scripture: 7 *They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?"*

First of all, Moses never commanded this. It was a concession, and listen to Jesus answer because it helps us understand how to approach slavery also.

*8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses **permitted** you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.*

He corrects their claim that Moses commanded divorce. He says Moses permitted divorce in some instances, but the reason for the concession is what we're after. *but from the beginning it has not been this way.*

Jesus separates the perfect design, before sin entered the world, from the reality after sin entered the world. God's design for marriage was perfect. Sin messes it up. Sin is like acid that eats at human relationships. God didn't design for marriages to become hopeless train wrecks. But sin makes it hard to stay married.

Similarly, God's design was that every man, woman, and child would bear the dignity of the image of God. There was no room for slavery in the original design.

But sin entered this world and slavery is just one manifestation of the brokenness of human society. It isn't the original glorious design or intent, but it is the reality of this world because of sin.

The Bible deals with slavery as an unfortunate consequence of sin. It just is. Like millions of shattered lives from broken relationships. Divorce just IS. Sin breaks everything.

The church in our current age, lives in a tension, a dimension that is fatally flawed by sin. And every age of the church can be visited and we can point out the different flaws. We're blindsided because we dwell in a sinful world, and the church at different times and in different ways has adopted the world's errors.

Let me try to give some perspective to that. It's complicated. In the 1860's the baptist's split, north vss. south over slavery. Southern baptists were for slavery. So much so that they split with baptists in the north and became the Southern Baptist convention.

150 years later, that is an embarrassment to the Southern Baptists and we've lost track of how many times they have apologized for that error. The folks 150 years ago were blind-sided. They didn't see what we see clearly now. American slavery was wrong.

But knowing that we can be blind-sided and make grievous mistakes, in our latent sinfulness (we're saved ultimately, but sin and its consequences don't leave us overnight) what is our current generation blind-sided by.

We're so proud of our wokeness these days, pointing fingers at past generations and apologizing, what is it that we're blind sided about? Let me give you some ideas perhaps, that fit well with our story this week.

The opposite of slavery is autonomy. Freedom. And our generation worships the idol of autonomy at the expense of everything else. And what we have done is that in our freedom, we have made every free individual a little god.

No one can decide what is right or wrong for me except me. I'm god and it must be that way. And the opposite of me being god to decide what it is that I'm going to be and do, anything that holds me back is oppression. Anything that challenges the idol god of autonomy is oppression.

And we've got all these woke ideas of oppression. Whites oppress blacks. Men oppress women. Old oppress young. Religious folk oppress everybody. Especially LGBTQ++ folk. Christians oppress everybody's version of I AM God. The Bible oppresses and threatens the me-god of autonomy.

You realize I hope what is at the center of the current rather crazed rush to increase every possible variety of murdering unborn babies. It's the autonomous god thing. Women must be god equally as men are. But women get pregnant with little demanding gods who take away their

liberties.

Well, unfortunately, the only equitable way forward in the progressive march to be autonomous gods is for women to have full autonomy to murder the life inside them that threatens their position of god over themselves. So we've gone berserk in the whole baby murder discussion. Equal autonomy with men says we must be free to murder the babies right up to birth and full equality says the government must pay for it.

Then there's the whole equality dimension of my godness. If everyone's not perfectly equal, oppression happens. We have to make everyone equal. All the autonomous gods have to be equal to all the other autonomous gods or oppression occurs.

Evangelicalism has bought into this idea wholesale. Suddenly the church has gone to war with the church over social justice issues of equality and doing penance for our fathers and grandfathers who were oppressors. We have to beg forgiveness for the sins of previous generations of oppressors.

I think our blind-side is Satan getting us all worked up over issues that have little to do with anything. Slavery. Racial injustice. LGBTQ++ injustice. Sexual injustice. Marriage injustice. Divorce injustice. All of this baggage that Jesus seems to skip over.

Of course everyone's broken. Of course there's every possible kind of injustice and oppression. We're living in Satan's world. Jesus didn't come to fix this world, He came to forgive sin, which forever blocks our relationship with the father, and to depose Satan and bring the next world which will be ruled perfectly by Him.

This age where Satan rules is never going to be fixed. It's always going to be broken. But Jesus by His shed blood purchases individuals OUT

of this world who belong to Him and one by one, those who know and love Him can escape the brokenness of this world and cling to Him.

Apologizing for slavery or whatever else the flavor of the day oppression is that we're apologizing for only does one thing. It sidetracks the gospel. Trying to fix this world, sidetracks the gospel.

Now slavery in our nation was far more degraded than the slavery present at Jesus time. It's always a sin when any person thinks they are better than another person. The racial aspect of our brand of slavery in America was then, and is always sin.

If you think you're better than someone else because of the color of your skin, or for that matter any other difference, it's sin. Oppression of a people because of race, is sinful. Ethnic hatred regardless of skin color is evil. The jews were the same color as the Nazi's. Racial and ethnic bias and hatred is always sin. The Bible is clear about that.

In Israel, in Jesus time, slavery existed but it wasn't a racial distinction. Often conquering armies took captives that were then sold into slavery, but that might have been the better choice if the other one was death.

Do I have the solution for the social justice warriors who are demanding reparations for someone else's sins 165 years ago. I do, but no one is going to listen. Actually this book has the answer to the problem and the solution.

Sin caused the harm that every human has suffered, regardless of color or race or ethnicity. People harm people, people oppress people because of sin. Satan runs this world and he is harsh. People harm people.

Where is the justice. Where is the equity. If God is real, why doesn't He fix it.

He is. Just not on your time shedule. He's fixing it on His schedule. Every sin, every harm will have an accounting. And a day is coming, we think soon, when Jesus will return to this world and depose Satan and set up His perfect, equitable, righteous Kingdom on earth.

It won't be fixed in this age. In this age there is nothing but brokenness and sin. Hatred, oppression, injustice, murder are all things Satan loves to heap on this world. This age.

We will see over and over that Jesus hasn't come to change the social order of this sinful age. He doesn't fix the divorces or the slaves or anything else that is part of a sinful world. He comes to fix sin. He died to pay our debt of sin, and He returns to depose the author of sin.

I hope that helps you to see more clearly as we dive into Jesus dealing with a slave owner. In our story this morning, Jesus never says a thing about slaves and oppression. At the end of the story, a slave is still a slave and a slave owner is still a slave owner.

1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die.

We've talked about slaves a little bit. The slave in this story remains unnamed. All we know is that he belonged to a centurion.

Centurion's were so-named because they were in charge of 100 men who were soldiers for Rome to keep the peace. Capernaum was the largest city along the northern shore and it obviously was situated so that a roman battalion could respond to keep the pax romana, the roman peace.

Centurion's were well paid by Rome. They were paid between 50 and a hundred times what the soldiers under their charge were paid. So he was an important man.

We don't know how many slaves he owned, but one in particular was sick and near death, and we learn that this particular slave was like a son to this man, beloved and of much value. The word translated *highly regarded* is the same word Paul used to describe Epaphroditus, the beloved disciple that had been sent to minister to Paul.

In Ppn. 2:29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Epaphroditus was a hero. Highly esteemed because he was willing to give all, even his life, in order to help Paul and the gospel. This slave is highly esteemed by his master and owner. Highly valued.

3 And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

In the Jewish world at that moment, this slave is quite a few circles removed from Jesus. We've got a Roman who is an occupier in Israel, who owns a slave who is from who know's where. There are too many degrees of separation here for this not to be in the highly irregular category.

They need a favor from an important Jew. In most cases that wouldn't fly very well. And we're going to learn of this man's humility and godliness as the story progresses, but here we learn that he doesn't come to ask Jesus himself, he sends some Jewish elders.

These would have been men of some rank and importance in the Jewish community, a circle closer to Jesus, and they come in behalf of the centurion with his request. Please come and save the life of this beloved slave.

4 And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue."

They come with the best arguments that this world can generate. Please come and grant this request because this man is worthy, even though he's a Roman, he actually is a patriot to our nation, he loves our nation, and beyond that he built us our synagogue.

Notice here that in the Jewish religion mindset, worthiness is attached to works of righteousness. Jesus should come and give the man his request because he has converted to our religion and he has built our house of worship for us.

6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof;

This is an astonishing further revelation about this man. What he is saying here is what Peter said when the fish were about to sink the boats. *Depart from me Oh Lord, for I am a sinful man.*

Or Manoah in Judges 13:22 *And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.*

The remarkable thing is, where does this come from. Jesus just finished speaking to thousands in the sermon on the mount who don't think this about Him, and here's a non-Jew, a gentile, a Roman who gets it. This man totally understands the deity of Jesus. How?

He successfully gets Jesus to come to his house, but he says, I'm not worthy for the Son of God to be in my house . . .

7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

This really is astonishing faith. Israel has seen all the miracles and doesn't believe. This gentile says; *say the word* The worlds were spoken into existence from nothing by this Man. The power to heal is in your will, your words. *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

Where does that faith come from. How is it that this man gets it. He sees and understands what all of Israel have missed. God has done a work in his heart. His soul has been quickened by God to understand what Israel doesn't understand. *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

It gets better. Listen to his logic.

8“For I, too, am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

Here is his logic and exactly what he's saying to Jesus. I have authority in the physical realm. I speak and people act to fulfil my requests. I have the authority to command people to do things, and they must obey.

You have authority in the realm that only God has authority. You speak and demons flee. You speak and sickness becomes wellness. You speak and creation of something from nothing is possible. You speak and the wind obeys your voice, therefore; *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

Everything the centurion said about Jesus is true. He is Lord of everything. Everything that hears His voice, must obey. Except people.

In this world, in this age where Satan is ruler of this world and sin reigns, obedience to Jesus is only for the few that He owns.

The called out ones. The ones who have left the old world behind and embraced belonging to Jesus. For those few, He is Lord and they are doulos, slaves.

The irony of this story, and I believe Luke has placed it here on purpose, is that a few verses back, Jesus says, *why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say.*

And the next man we meet says, you have authority over everything. Everything has to obey your voice, just like in my little realm my soldiers and my slaves have to obey my voice.

Luke brings us a conundrum. Lk. 6:46 *Why do you call me Lord Lord and do not do what I say.* And a centurion who says; 7:7 *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

Jesus says; *All authority has been given to me in earth and in heaven* And the centurion correctly understands and recognizes that just a word from Jesus will send the illness of his precious slave fleeing. Yet we have a few billion people on this earth who claim to be christians and then ignore the words of Jesus.

The reality of their lives doesn't match their claim that He is Lord. They have no intention to listen to His voice and obey it.

Jesus commands demons, pigs, animals, wind, food, sea, money, disease, blindness, fish, death, and a host of others I haven't thought of and they obey His voice. But people, God has given us free will to obey or not to obey, in this life.

But an age is coming when that's all over. Every knee will bow to Jesus,

on earth, in heaven, in hell, every person will obey, every knee will bow. This centurion acknowledges that hidden authority. He sees it wide eyed. He tells Jesus, *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

*9 Now when Jesus heard this, He **marveled** at him, and turned and said to the multitude that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."*

Matthew adds something else Jesus said to the crowd who had followed to see what He would do;

From Mt. 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west to share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the sons of the kingdom will be cast into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is a grave warning to Israel first, but also to all the "sons" who claim Jesus as Lord and do not do what His voice says;

Israel had seen more than anyone else had seen and still did not believe. Jesus says gentiles from east and west will dine at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob while the sons of the kingdom, the Jews, will be cast out because of unbelief.

This Roman gentile gets it while the Jews who have seen all the miracles are plotting His death.

10 And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Jesus doesn't have any problem commanding whatever disease this was that had this man almost at death's door. Jesus speaks and the disease flees. What of us then? Jesus speaks and His words are optional? Everything in the universes bend at His commands, but we think we

have choice to obey or not to obey His voice? Does that somehow seem a little bit scary to you?

I urge all of us to examine our lives, to re-commit our wills to His ownership and command. It is a sweet slavery now, He is not a hard master. Listen to some terms of slavery that God offers those who will come out of Satan's world and belong to Jesus instead;

Matt. 11:28 *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 “For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”*