

Part 48: Punishment and Preoccupation

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Have you ever met anyone whose life seemed to be lived with a singular commitment to something?

Alex Honnold, is an alpinist who free climbs some of the world's most difficult rock faces in the world. He's driven to do so because the call of the mountains consumes him. He says, "For me, climbing is like breathing. It's something I have to do to feel alive. I can't imagine my life without it."

His girlfriend affirms this when she says, "Alex is so focused on climbing that he can be pretty oblivious to everything else going on around him. Sometimes I feel like I'm dating a rock...It's all he ever thinks about."

John Muir once famously said, "The mountains are calling, and I must go." What he poetically stated, Honnold perfectly applies. According to Muir, there is in the mountains an obligation, an imperative, that calls out to us. If we hear it, we must respond to it.

As we have been working through the gospel of Luke, Jesus has been teaching us how we ought to view our lives and our times in light of Jesus' second coming. Waiting is often hard for us because we don't know what to do with it. Out of boredom we often fill our time, out of frustration we often drift, and out of ignorance we sometimes just sit.

But what Jesus did for us last week was hold up the beautiful call of the mountain of grace. He showed us that heaven's summit is the very pleasure of the Father and the reward of the Son. To put it another way, heaven is captivating. But what Jesus is going to show us today is that this reward also has a moral obligation. It cannot simply be enjoyed, it must be obeyed.

The mountains calls some, but Christ calls all. Jesus calls us in this day and time not simply to be spectators of the coming kingdom, but faithful and active servants of the kingdom. For Honnold to not live in service of the mountains would be to suffer miserably. But for humanity, to not live in service to Jesus our Master, is to suffer an even worse fate in hell.

What we are going to see this morning is this simple truth: **Jesus shows us God's will for our life and we are held responsible to participate in it.** Jesus is calling us here, and we must go.

We are going to look at this text in three parts. First we are going to look at **The Master's Purpose**, then we are going to look at **The Servant's Perversion**, and lastly we will see **A Serious Warning**.

Now this whole parable Jesus is about to give starts because Peter is responding to the story Jesus just gave. That story warned of losing, but more so it boasted of the immense reward that was held out for those who are ready servants of the kingdom.

His question is, "Are these rewards, and this warning, just for us as your 12 apostles? Or does everyone get this reward?" Who benefits here? Who needs to stay awake?

And this is where Jesus answers the question by not answering the question. Peter says, "Who needs to pay attention?" Jesus answers, "Who is the faithful and wise manager?"

Who needs to listen? The worker who is faithful and wise. But the wisdom the manager has is not primarily his skill, but the understanding he has about his call and job. This is our first point this morning: **The Master's Purpose.**

Jesus is here alluding to some cultural household norms of the day. It was common that in a house, there was a master who was the owner, and then there were often servants who were managers. These managers ran the household, especially when the master was away.

When this happened, the manager, who was himself a servant, was a representation of the master and was held responsible for making sure that all the other members of the household acted in accordance with the master's wishes.

Here we see Jesus teaching us about what our relationship to him is like: Jesus is a master of the house. He owns it, he is Lord of it. But what does he do? He sets wise and faithful managers over it.

The managers are given not only the master's word and wish, but the master's property and possessions. They are stewards. Stewards not only of the master's property, but the master's people. The faithful manager was entrusted over other servants.

Jesus is saying to us, "The rewards of heaven are for any who do this." Jesus sets us up with borrowed authority over what is rightfully his, and then he commands us to give out of those possessions to others for their own good.

The wise manager uses the pantries of the master to give the servants their food in the proper time. So in other words those who want to be wise workers understand their responsibility not only to God, but to others. And everything we are asked to give to others, the master has graciously given to us.

This is more than just a parable, this is a reaffirmation of what we were made for in Genesis chapter 1.

In the Garden of Eden, God created Adam and he placed him in charge of the garden. God made man and woman in his own image. That idea of "image bearing" inside of this culture didn't simply mean "likeness." But it was common for kings to set up "images" in different towns which represented the rule and authority the king had in that place.

God made humans in a perfect world to be representations of his generous will. Look at this authority and the provision God gives to Adam in **Genesis 1:28-29**.

In Genesis 2 we find that outside of the garden was untamed wilderness. But inside the garden God gave man a purpose. In **Genesis 2:15**, it says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Man was entrusted by God's authority, to steward the riches of the garden, and to work and expand the garden by babies and boundaries so that more people might see and know the beauty of God.

Jesus here, as the true and perfect image of God, now leaves us with the same command. Jesus never leaves us without telling us what to do. Everything you have in life has been given to you by Jesus for the purpose of serving others from his pantry of grace.

Jesus then gives us an example of what this would look like: **Luke 12:43-44**.

Blessed is the servant, who in hearing the master's purpose to steward and serve busies himself with it! This fits with Jesus three part view of discipleship that we have seen in the book of Luke. If you remember all the way back to Luke 6, Jesus says the wise man is the one who comes to me, hears my word, and does something with it.

J.C. Ryle says of this text, "We learn in these verses the importance of doing in our Christianity." He says this isn't an example of what saves us, but instead it's a glimpse into what saved people do. He continues to say, "It is not the servant who his master found wishing and professing, but the servant who is found doing that Jesus calls 'blessed.'"

I'm not sure what you think of when you hear the word "blessed." But it's not some esoteric religious word. It means better, it means "happier." Happy is the servant who is found doing this kind of service when Jesus gets back. The reward is that he will give you more tools, even in heaven, to glorify God and love others.

This is the wise and faithful manager: one who comes to the master, knows his will, and serves everyone else out of the master's provision. Who is the reward of glory for, asks Peter? Those who live for the master.

We can talk more of what that means later, but first you need to understand what Jesus is saying. If Jesus is your "Lord," that's what Peter calls him, then he is also your "master." They are actually the same word in the Greek. To confess Christ as Lord is to actually submit your whole life in service of the master's house through the service of the master's people.

To not do this, is to get into trouble. That's the point Jesus makes next when we see our second point: **The Servant's Perversion**. Read with me **Luke 12:45-48a**.

So what we see here first and foremost is a contrast. The faithful servant was found doing, but here is a servant who is in the end judged unfaithful and he is found abusing all that the master left in his charge.

Pay close attention to how this whole slide started. The servant looked at the delayed return of the master and instead of focusing on the master's command, began to talk to his own heart. Didn't we see this already with the rich fool who began to speak to his own soul? Didn't we see this in the garden where Satan crept into the stewardship of Adam and Eve and asked, "Did God really say?"

We often talk about the need of preaching the gospel to ourselves and here's why: because if left on our own we will start preaching some pretty dumb stuff to ourselves. The less commitment we exert to the words and wishes of our master, the easier and easier it is to view life through the lens of ourselves not our savior.

This is why the author of Hebrews (**Heb. 3:13**) calls us to "exhort one another daily as long as it is called today so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin". As believers we need to remind

ourselves and others daily that though Jesus has left us in body he has not left us in voice. He speaks to us through his word, he works in us through his Spirit. Moreover we are surrounded by other faithful masters who are reminding us of this as well. Our marching orders have not grown quiet as we await the Lord's return.

But here the servant looks at the delay of the master and the implication is this: it's safe to do what I want. So what does he do? Instead of serving others and stewarding the master's provision he strikes others and stuffs himself with the master's provisions.

What's the shift that happens? He stops seeing everything in his life as belonging to Jesus and to be used for the glory of Jesus and instead starts seeing all he has as belonging to him for the service of himself.

When we lose the purpose of God for our lives, everything begins to crumble. It becomes increasingly hard for us to love others because without the good news of the gospel of grace we innately view others as tools or threats.

You see if it's only grace, that is the gift of Jesus and not anything in the world that satisfies, we innately have two choices. The first is we see that, take from Jesus' mercy, and are therefore generous with everything in our lives because we realize we are already satisfied. Or we refuse to see that Jesus alone is sufficient and we begin to hoard and steal from others to keep what we will eventually lose.

When we live for the glory of self, everyone suffers.

Jesus gives three categories of unfaithful servants here and the commonality is their relationship to knowing the will of the master.

There's the first malicious servant who is so arrogant and hardened that he knows the will of the master and goes out of his way to do the opposite. When the master comes back, he will be found in direct rebellion, he will be cut into pieces and he will be thrown with the unfaithful--he is no servant at all.

The second servant knows the master's will, doesn't do the opposite like the first. But also doesn't get ready or act according to the master's will. He knows it, he doesn't work against it, he maybe even got along well with his other servants, but at the end he is punished too.

Then there's a third servant, this servant wasn't told by others the master's will, but because of that he too didn't do what was right and he too then received a punishment, though less than the other two.

What is Jesus doing by showing these three servants? He's saying that if those who don't know about the master's will and fail to submit themselves to it are still punished, how much more punishment is reserved for those who hear it and do nothing with it, or those who hear it and actively labor against it?

Everyone is liable to judgement. There is no excuse. They live in the master's house, they have the master's food, and therefore, there is an obligation. Jesus here lands in a staggering summary in our final point this morning: **A Serious Warning.**

Look again at **Luke 12:48b.**

What's Jesus' point here? Be warned. Everyone is meant and made to know and serve this master. Everyone will be held in account. Judgement is universal, but woe to the ones who know more, woe to those who sit here and hear this, and who fail to live with a preoccupation and consuming vision for the master's will.

In these three servants we have three warnings and I think we can apply them to three distinct groups of people. That is a warning to shepherds, a warning to sheep, and a warning to servants.

First, **shepherds**. This text is a warning to those elders who are in pastoral ministry and all who aspire to pastoral ministry.

Brother elders, notice the weight that Jesus gives to our ministry. Peter understood that Jesus was talking to him and the apostles. His question was not: Is this for us or for others? But "Is this for us, or all of us?"

We, having been set apart as shepherds of a flock, having been affirmed publicly for our knowledge of the gospel and our ability to keep it, protect it and preach it—we will be judged more severely should we neglect the purpose of Christ and use our position and platform in service of self.

This is not a new problem. In the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel rebukes the gluttonous shepherds of Israel in **Ezekiel 34:1-4**.

In the New Testament, even after we have seen the good shepherd par-excellence in Jesus Christ, Peter urgently exhorts elders saying this: **1 Peter 5:1-4**. Do you think perhaps Peter had this teaching in Luke in mind when he wrote that passage?

Richard Baxter wrote in the years following the reformation calling pastors to not sit presumptuously in their study when eternal souls were perishing in their pews. Andrew Fuller a century later warned of pastors who engage in "spiritual gossip"—baptizing conversations and actions in spiritual talk while being absent of any urgency to call others to the will of God in Christ.

Today, our cultural moment is one where spiritual abuse is often the first idea associated with the church. There's lots of "church hurt" out there. Some of this, I'm sure, is due to the simple fact that pastors are just sheep in shepherds clothing. Even the best pastor is just a sheep, just as the best manager is still a servant. No pastor can pastor perfectly, that's why Ezekiel closes his rebuke saying this: **Ezekiel 34:11-12**. Pastors must own their charge by constantly living in the reality that all we have belongs to the chief shepherd, and we are not him.

But Jesus doesn't show such aggression to the involuntarily limited shepherd, but instead the willfully negligent and abusive managers. This passage isn't about humble sheep in shepherds clothing, but malicious wolves in sheep's clothing. They tear, maim, and destroy for their own selfish end. And I want all of us to hear in this text that no one is more disgusted, more enraged, or more repulsed by this perversion than Jesus himself.

This is what leads to the staunch warning of bodies being cut up and cast out among the unfaithful.

But what this passage also reminds us of is that abuse doesn't negate proper use. When a manager acts this way he is to be rebuked and condemned apart from his repentance. But just because one shepherd

acts in such a way doesn't mean that shepherds are the problem. In fact the only way we know what's abusive is because we know what is proper and good. We know you shouldn't use an ice pack as a weapon because we've seen its proper use as medicine!

Remember that shepherds are God's gift to the church when they do as Jesus called them: to stewards the household and feed the servants in the proper time. May we be a church of elders and of fellow servants who exemplify a relationship of mutual care, mercy and ministry. Shepherds are to be preoccupied with the task of Christ exalting, people-serving, ministry.

But this passage also applies broadly *to sheep*.

If you are a Christian, if you are simply a sheep and not a shepherd, this is to consume you as well. That's why Jesus doesn't answer Peter's question in a narrow way.

The call to be responsible for the household of Jesus, and serve fellow servants is a universal call to all Christians!

Look at how the Bible speaks of this: **Ephesians 4:12** and **1 Corinthians 4:1**. We are made ministers and stewards of the gospel. Saints meant to serve saints. Peter, right before he charges the shepherds, charges the sheep in 1 Peter 2 calling all of us "a holy priesthood," that is people who take the grace that God has provided and give it to others as well.

Jesus himself calls all of us in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded them.

See you too, are a servant commissioned to call others into alignment with the will of the master. We want people not just to know Jesus, but to follow his will. You might say, "Hold on a minute. I've never gone to seminary, I don't know how to lead a Bible study, I've not read a bunch of theology."

When God appeared to Moses, Moses said the same thing. He said, "God do you know who I am? I'm slow of speech and of tongue." Do you remember what God said to him in Exodus 4? God said, "I know who you are, do you know who I am? I'm the one who made your mouth, and I'm going to use it."

Everything we have been given, has been given by the master for the purpose of the master. Have you been saved? Have you been converted by faith in Jesus Christ? Do you realize the weight of your sins and how Christ and Christ alone is the sufficient sacrifice for it? Have you received mercy? Then look at what Paul says of you in **2 Corinthians 4:1**.

We have ministry by mercy. Jesus saved you and set you over his creation so that you might serve others with the very thing that served you. You are called to go as the faithful manager to help others live according to the will of the master.

There will be times where this seems yucky and tricky. When we see other believers stuck in sin, you might feel like the second servant--knowing what to do, but not wanting to do it. You might think it's less uncomfortable for everyone involved to just let it go. But your avoidance of God's call to help others doesn't save people from shame. One day that individual who you refuse to serve will have to stand before God. And one day, you will have to stand before God and explain why you knew what to do and

didn't do it. James says in **James 4:17**, "So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."

We need wisdom to do this, but who is Jesus describing here but the wise and faithful servant. Jesus' pantry is full of grace and truth, wisdom and warning. But we must be faithful to warn because judgment is universal.

This is where I want to close today by addressing what this passage means **to servants**.

The way Jesus sets up this parable means that whether you are in here today and think you know Jesus, whether you actively oppose Jesus, or whether you're still trying to figure out who Jesus is, you are a servant in this passage.

Remember in the household in Jesus' parable here there are faithful and wise servants, and there are servants who are punished and prove themselves to be unfaithful. In other words the household here isn't the church but the whole world. All humanity is indebted to serve the master who made them for their joy.

We were made to bear the image of God, steward his gifts, and help others serve him. That's the blessed life. That's a human reality. All of us are held responsible to the master who made the world and who feeds us by rains and grains. It's not a question of "are you a servant," but "are you a faithful or an unfaithful one."

To be a faithful servant, you must know the master. You've got to come to him. By sitting here and listening to me today, you know his will for you. You are no longer ignorant of what God demands. He demands that you come to him as a servant. That you seek first and foremost to know how Jesus as Lord has provided for us grace by dying for our sins, and that in him and him alone we have forgiveness and salvation.

But then when we know him, we prove our salvation and conversion by living for him. Come to him being woken out of your sleep by the reality of judgment, but serve him and submit to him out of a zeal for the reward of Jesus.

You might have a large track record of neglect. But Jesus has a larger track record of mercy. Paul spent much of his life as the first servant in this passage—killing Christians. But look at what he says about his life once Jesus saved him: **Philippians 3:13-15**.

There is more to be gained in the service of Christ than we can gain anywhere else. If you are here this morning, you are now the second servant. You know his will. So come. Come by grace and work by gratitude.

Christ has called, and we must go!