

The Father's Business

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God made it very clear that Christ was to be the firstborn of many brothers. (Rom. 8:29, Col. 1:18, etc.) To “as many as received [Christ], to them He gave the right to become children of God...” (Jn. 1:12) The process of repentance, faith and receiving results in a new birth (Jn. 3:3, 5) in which we cease to be children of darkness and become children of light. (Eph. 5:8) This miraculous transformation is the gift from God we call “salvation,” a term true enough in itself but too often we are so self-focused that we consider “being saved” to be the end goal and summation of the work of Christ in our life. This is as short-sighted as supposing that a newly born infant is to remain an infant and never become a fully-matured adult!

When Jesus was twelve years old (most likely in 9 A.D.), He went with His mother and stepfather to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover Feast. Instead of returning to Nazareth in Galilee with His parents, He stayed at the Temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. After searching Jerusalem for three days, Joseph and Mary finally found Him. And Jesus said to them, “Why didn’t you know where to find Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Lk. 2:41-49)

That a son was to work for his father was – and even still is – such an integral part of the Jewish customs. From the time of the patriarchs sons worked for their fathers until they attained to their independence and stature in the community. Jesus was speaking as a Jewish boy about to become a man (the coming of age occurs at thirteen years of age) and He wanted to be ready to speak the word of His real Father, God, and apparently figured that the Temple was where He should be. The “Father’s business,” for Jesus, however, instead included submitting to His parents and returning to Galilee (Lk. 2:51-52) and waiting about 20 years before He would again publicly go about His Father’s business, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

When we begin to consider just what the heavenly Father’s business is, we approach a vast subject, what Paul called “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8) We must also recognize that this vast subject is “veiled” or “concealed” or “cloaked” from those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:3) and “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them for they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. 2:14) The Father’s business cannot be explained to those who do not have eyes to see and ears to hear the things of the Spirit of God. (Mt. 13:13) Thus the first thing we need to “learn” is that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (Jn. 4:24) We cannot give lip service or practice carnal, fleshly religiosity and expect God to think we’re really going about doing the Father’s business.

The Jews had for centuries been obeying the Law and *doing* its requirements when Jesus began publicly doing His Father’s business. When the crowds whom He had fed with loaves and fishes followed Him to the other side of the lake, He warned them, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...” These Jewish seekers then displayed their familiarity with doing something *for* God (and their complete misunderstanding of what God desired and required of them) by asking, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus then presents them with the truth in their own terms: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (Jn. 6:27-29) Because these Jewish people did not believe in Christ, they simply could not be about the Father’s business.

Jesus taught His disciples what we commonly call the parable of the prodigal son. When the prodigal son set his heart to return home, he thought that returning as a servant would be

sufficient. (Lk. 15:17-19) When he arrived home he said to his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” The father, however, ignores him and calls for the robe and ring that proclaimed his status as son. (Lk. 15:21-22) The prodigal son’s newly attained recognition that he was not worthy to be treated as a son is as noteworthy as the father’s refusal to receive him as anything but a son.

Jesus taught another parable about two sons. The father commanded both sons to work in the vineyard that day. One said he would not, but later regretted it and went and worked. The second said he would go, but never did. Jesus then asks the question, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” (Mt. 21:28-31) We could readily rephrase that question into the current context by asking “Which of the two actually did their father’s business?” It is the son who worked through his own issues and actually went and did what he had been commanded who was about his father’s business.

Jesus taught another parable and said, “The kingdom of God is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son...” (Mt. 22:2) We need to notice some things here as Jesus, in this parable and with great prophetic precision, brings this vast subject of the heavenly Father’s business into amazing clarity.

- “the kingdom of God” – that realm where Christ and God are actually obeyed.
- “a certain king” – God is the King over all kings and is thus the main character in this story.
- “a marriage” – the bride of Christ is to be wedded to the Lamb. (Rev. 19:7-9) And although the bride herself is not brought into view in this parable, the idea of the wedding feast is used to compare those who obey the summons to the feast and those who do not obey, either by excusing themselves beforehand (Mt. 22:3, 5-6) or by coming to the wedding feast improperly attired (symbolic of attempting to attain salvation by works – Rom. 3:20, etc. – or of over-reliance on “grace” and doing *no* works – Mt. 22:11, Rev. 19:8)

In this particular parable all the servants who are sent have only one assignment – share the invitation to the marriage supper of the king’s son. (Mt. 22:3-4, 9) The works of men done in the name of Christ and God will be evaluated as to how well or how poorly those works accomplished this only assignment. Those whose works actually built something will be tested by fire, Paul wrote, and the quality of the material used will determine the reward. But those whose works (or lack of works) brings defilement into God’s temple (His people), that one will himself be destroyed. (1 Cor. 3:12-17) The lawless, those who do right in their own eyes – no matter how wonderful or powerful the works they did *in Christ’s name* - will be dismissed from the Lord’s presence. (Mt. 7:22-23)

Working Sons

The writer of Hebrews admonished his readers, “We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become lazy, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Heb. 6:11-12) Often the “gospel” of the “church” comes across as “cheap and easy grace” by which one is given the “free

gift” of “God’s salvation” and then the “believer” is under no responsibility to obey God nor confronted with any fear or worry of future punishment. This false “gospel,” built on elements of truth, is merely a distortion and imbalance of spiritual realities. God does not give men the right to become lazy children of His – He gives them the right to bear His glorious name and to radiate the likeness of His Son to a lost and dying world. To even suggest that God gives a man new birth from above so that he might enjoy amnesty while he remains a full-fledged, fallen and darkened enemy of God is to entirely misunderstand the gospel of Christ! No! The redemptive grace of God is given to men so that they might become sons who diligently pursue their Father’s business.

Paul wrote,

“When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law; that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.” (Gal. 4:4-8)

Similarly, to the Romans, Paul wrote,

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:16-23)

This passage is Paul’s answer to the question, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (Rom. 6:15) In the context we have been pursuing, we could rephrase that question into “Shall we engage in activities and matters that oppose our Father’s business just because He once graciously forgave us our previous misdeeds that opposed His business?” When the question is asked in this way, its folly and ludicrous nature are readily apparent, at least to those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Slaves and sons have this in common – all must work. Only the idle rich (who have acquired wealth – most often at someone else’s expense) and the lazy (who steal or beg their sustenance) are exempt from work. Since both of these lifestyles incorporate sin at one level or another, they cannot be patterns to imitate and follow for the sons of the righteous and holy God.

The grace of God is given to men so that they are free to choose whether to be a slave of sin (which leads to death) or a slave of righteousness who, because he is empowered by God, works to both keep what God has given him and to bring forth an increase for his Father's business. (see Mt. 25:20-23) Those who receive something of the immeasurable riches of God's grace but who continue to wallow in the filth and sin of self and this world are those who bury the gift of God and do nothing to use or increase what God has given them. (Mt. 25:24-30)

Paul wrote that we, when we were children of darkness, "served those which by nature are not gods." (Gal. 4:8) In writing to the carnal Corinthians, he warned them, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." (1 Cor. 10:21) This is similar to Jesus' instruction, "You cannot serve God and mammon." (Mt. 6:24) To be a son of God in this life is to forsake all the gods of this world and live as sons of light.

Paul wrote, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." (Rom. 8:12-17)

Here is where the lethal scope of "church" comes into view. The "church," using the name of Christ to lure and draw its passive listeners to prefer some form of unrighteousness, darkness or lawlessness, in reality lures its victims back into the realms of the flesh – which, Paul writes, if we obey the flesh, we will die. It is when we are led by the Spirit of God that we will do the works God planned in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10) It is the Spirit of truth – not some man tickling our ears with deceptions we want to hear – who leads us into all truth. (Jn. 16:13, 2 Tim. 4:3-4) It is the words that proceed from the mouth of God – not the mouths of men - by which we derive life. (Mt. 4:4, Jer. 23:16) It is when we desire the will of God first and foremost that we will know by what authority – divine, merely human or demonic – anyone is proclaiming what they put forth as "gospel truth." (Jn. 7:17)

It was prophesied of the Messiah that the will of God would be His prime directive. "Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God." (Heb. 10:7, Psa. 40:8) Even on the night of His crucifixion, the "bottom line" to His prayer was, "Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." (Lk. 22:42) This was the driving impetus in the life of Jesus – the will of God – and it is to be the driving impetus in the lives of the sons of God who are led and indwelt and filled with the Spirit of Christ and God. Otherwise, we have become led, indwelt, filled and owned by some other spirit. Any other driving forces are simply diversions for us designed to draw us away from and off of the narrow path that leads to life. (Mt. 7:14)

Paul wrote that we are "joint heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him." (Rom. 8:17) The "church" often preaches a pain-free "gospel" of health, wealth and prosperity. And then its victims, at least those who truly seek Christ in the midst of the deceptive "church" context, wonder why "bad" things happen to them! In such circumstances, one must choose whether to remain loyal to the false sunshine "gospel" or to follow after the Lamb who leads His followers into – *and through!* - wildernesses, oppressions, tribulations and persecutions. Christ promises His life to those who obey Him and overcome, with His strength, power, grace and

truth, the lures of this world and the deceptions of the enemy of our souls. To be a son of God in this life, then, is to, in spirit and truth, pursue *all* aspects of our Father's business. Anything less is merely another form of the Satanic counterfeit churchianity wherein men march in lock step down the broad road that leads to destruction (Mt. 7:13) while speaking words and singing songs that contain the truths whereby they could be set free and find life. The "church" is the "factory" wherein tares (Mt. 13:38) are manufactured and only those who escape the evil influence and become purified sons of the kingdom of their Father will shine like the sun in their wicked and perverse generation. (Mt. 13:43, Phlp. 2:15)

Let he who has ears hear.

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