

Thorsten Evans / General

The Church Built Up / 1 Corinthians 4

Today we continue our message series out of the book of 1 Corinthians. We will cover chapter 4 in its entirety today.

We are going to look at the nature of a servant according to Paul...really, we are going to look at the nature of a servant according to God. Before we read, let's look quickly at a few of the times where Jesus speaks about being a servant:

Mark 10:43–45 NIV

⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Luke 22:27 NIV

²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Mark 9:35 NIV

³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Jesus came and set aside his right as King and Lord in order to serve. As we read today, you'll see Paul has a similar posture as he leads people to follow Jesus. When we take on the nature of a servant, we take on the nature of Jesus.

Let's read our passage out of 1 Corinthians chapter 4 up to verse 13:

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 NIV

¹ This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

We'll cover these verses in more detail in a bit...

1 Corinthians 4:6–7 NIV

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond

what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. ⁷ For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Paul wants the church to see that scripture is pretty clear on what honor is due man and where we've gotten the things we have. The Corinthian church was proud of their achievements and were bragging about themselves and those they followed.

Here comes a bit of sarcasm from Paul:

1 Corinthians 4:8–10 NIV

⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! ⁹ For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!

They had placed their values in the wrong things. They were all about being propped up. In a word, they were prideful not only in how they saw themselves, but in how they worked so hard for it.

1 Corinthians 4:11–13 NIV

¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

Paul was not actually saying that they were scum or garbage, but relative to how the Corinthians saw themselves, Paul and the other leaders have no high position. They have willingly taken a low position in society.

A servant in Paul's time did not revolt or complain, they accepted their fate, kept their heads down and did what they were told. In contrast the Corinthian church was all about drawing attention to themselves and how great they were. They insisted on being served instead of serving. Paul is speaking a harsh truth to them, but in love.

Let's go back and look specifically at the first 5 verses and see the true nature of a servant:

1 Corinthians 4:1 NIV

¹ This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.

A servant is trusted by his master.

When a family had a servant, that servant had the run of the house. They had to in order to do the things they needed to do. They had access to the kitchen, the bedrooms and even the finances so they could go to market and get food and supplies.

The master would give the servant what they needed to complete the task required and they would trust that it would be completed.

God has done that with his servants over the years. He entrusts us as His servants with the mystery and knowledge of the gospel. He trusts us as his servants to do what He has asked us to do.

What has God entrusted to you as his servant? Is there something he has asked you to do? Is there something he has asked you not to do? God entrusts all of us with His Gospel, not just for our sake, but that we would share that Gospel with others.

Verse 2 then says this:

1 Corinthians 4:2 NIV

² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

When trusted, a servant is required to be faithful. There are 2 words here I want to emphasize:

- Required - This word means that it is demanded and needs serious effort to complete. There is no other option
- Prove - If an investigation is done, this is the result of that very careful investigation. There is no doubt.

If a master has trusted a servant, that servant is required to prove themselves faithful.

This is the second nature of the servant:

A servant is trusted by his master

A servant is faithful to his master

Have you been faithful with what he has entrusted you with?

The Corinthians saw themselves as the master. That everyone else served them, including Paul and Apollos. They had the wrong perspective on who Paul was to be faithful to...which leads Paul to say this:

1 Corinthians 4:3-4 NIV

³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the

Lord who judges me.

Paul is answering the question here...who should I please? Paul isn't doing what he does to please the church or a court, or even himself. These are all the wrong masters.

He has submitted himself to the judgement of only one master - Jesus. That is our 3rd nature of a servant:

A servant is trusted by his master

A servant is faithful to his master

A servant is judged by his master

I think we are all susceptible to submitting to judgement of the wrong master from time to time. Paul makes it clear that the Lord judges him.

I think we can all place ourselves in the position of master from time to time judging others when it is not our place to judge.

Some of you may be thinking about sending this message to someone else because you think they need to hear this. Let me just make an observation about that thought... who is judging who?

Just sayin...

Verse 5:

1 Corinthians 4:5 NIV

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

The church at Corinth was spending their time trying to set things straight in their own way - handing out judgement from their perspective. Paul says to them to wait and let the Lord do it. A trusted, faithful servant will be judged by his master and will ultimately be honored by his master.

That brings us to our final nature of a servant from this passage:

A servant is trusted by his master

A servant is faithful to his master

A servant is judged by his master

A servant is honored by his master

I think it is possible to us to self appoint ourselves to the master position. That is a very

dangerous place to be. We were never meant to be the true master of someone. Only God is meant to hold that role.

As a master, we will crumble under the pressure, we will hurt someone and likely ourselves. Even though we might mean think we mean well and know better, we don't.

If you've put the master crown on your head, you can either remove it yourself, or it will be forcefully removed for you. There is only one God on the throne. I've read to the end of the story and God will not tolerate someone sitting on his throne.

I also think it is possible for us to put the wrong person, or even a thing in the role of our master.

Spoiler alert, that doesn't turn out well either. Let's say you've made money your master. You have been faithful to work hard for your money. You have allowed the amount of money you have give you a sense of security and praise.

If that is you and your money is in the stock market, your security is down a bit.

If you make another person your master, at some point, you will be hurt. God alone was meant for this role. He knows you and what is best.

The way things are meant to be is for us to be a Servant of Christ.

A servant of Christ has been entrusted with the Gospel. Not just for eternal life, not just for a more purpose filled like here and now, but that we would tell other about the Gospel and what God has done for the world.

A servant of Christ is faithful to God's calling and direction. Faithful to His word. Faithful to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Faithful to answer to call.

A servant of Christ cares most of all what Jesus says about us. What the world has to say is foolishness compared to the promise of God through Jesus. We aim to please God and him alone with our life.

A servant of Christ is due an eternal reward for faithfulness.