



#3 Whose Are You? (Slaves & Saints)

TEXTS: Philippians 1:1-2, Acts 16:12-40, 20:3-6, I Thessalonians 2:2
Slave - servant: Philippians 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, 53:12
(Holman Christian Standard Version except as noted.)

Philippians 1:1-2, 2:7

¹ Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus:

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ was truly God. But he did not try to remain equal with God.

⁷ Instead he gave up everything and became a slave, when he became like one of us. ⁸ Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even died on a cross.

⁹ Then God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others. ¹⁰ So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. ¹¹ And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree, "Jesus Christ is Lord!"
(vv 2:6-11 NIV)

Isaiah 42:1, 53:12

"This is My Servant; I strengthen Him,
[this is] My Chosen One; I delight in Him.
I have put My Spirit on Him;
He will bring justice to the nations..."

Therefore I will give Him the many as a portion,
and He will receive the mighty as spoil,
because He submitted Himself to death,
and was counted among the rebels;
yet He bore the sin of many
and interceded for the rebels.

Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many."

Illustration: A man was invited to a dinner party with some friends. Being a photographer he took along a few of his photos. The hostess looked at them and said, "those are very good. You must have a very good camera."
After dinner that night as he was leaving he said to the hostess, "That was a very delicious dinner. You must have some very good pots."

All too often we gloss over things and make serious mistakes in our thinking. This message is about looking at things more carefully than we often do.

What comes to mind with the word, slave?

Does anybody think this way of himself/herself?

Who do you think is a saint? Are you one?

Many people, if they were looking at one of the letters from Paul, might think he would begin, as he does in this one to Philippi....

"This is St. Paul & St. Timothy. Hello slaves of Christ."

But... that is backward. What he really says is this, "This is from Paul & Timothy who are slaves of Christ to the holy ones in Philippi."

Slavery in Roman Times

Slavery began early in the Roman republic period, when parents were given the right to sell children into slavery or bankrupt debtors were forced to become slaves. But by the Christian era, the greatest source was captured soldiers and other "useful people" from defeated countries... 1000s of

people. There was such an active slave trade that certain sea ports were established as centers of a very wealthy business. There was a shortage of cheap labor and slaves fit the bill.

Purchasing a slaves, however, could cost the equivalent to thousand\$. At the slave auction, they usually came with a manifest of their intelligence, health, character and a guarantee if there was something wrong with them the seller had to take them back.

Children born to slaves became the property of the owner of the parents. Slaves in Rome, itself, were generally better off and did more interesting work than rural slaves who mostly did manual labor and received little appreciation for their actual great value to their owners.

There were plenty of cases of mistreatment and often people in a defeated country committed suicide rather than become a slave. But, Seneca, wrote that better treatment of slaves resulted in better work from them. However, any misbehavior by slaves resulted in harsh punishment... if a slave killed his master, all other slaves in the household were killed.

Despite that, of course, slaves still tried to escape. And there were bounty hunters.

One case of an escaped slave in the NT is Onesimus and the resulting letter by Paul to Philemon asking him to be gentle with the returning man because Onesimus, the runaway, had become a Christian and was personally helpful to Paul during his imprisonment. But legally he still belonged to Philemon, a wealthy Christian in Colossae, but now he was also a brother.

Over a century earlier, about 70BC , Spartacus led a revolt of 70,000 slaves to escape to Gaul. But they were defeated by the Roman army and the 6000 survivors of the battles were all crucified on the road leading into Rome.

Duties of slaves varied widely, generally they did manual labor, but others even practiced professions like medicine or education. Many slaves, former soldiers, were gladiators.

By the time of Christ, there were probably several million slaves in Italy, up to 40% of the total population.

Legal status of slaves = zero at first, but gradually some rights were granted to them after about 100AD. Earlier, a master could execute a slave for any reason without any penalty. But later slaves were permitted to file legal complaints against their masters.

Emancipation was given to a small number of slaves. These freedman wore a distinctive cap to announce their status. But even then they did not have full citizenship rights. Educated slaves stood the best chance of emancipation.

The master of the house could have children by his slaves. In his will, a slave owner could free his slaves or he could set them free by a process called, 'manumissio'.

The New Testament does not advocate slave rebellion or escape. Rather it teaches the equality of all persons, free or slave. Everyone Christian is to live a holy life regardless of circumstances. (Saint means simply one who lives a holy and distinctive life.)

Christians were divided in our own country about the legitimacy of slavery from the beginning and in the 1800s this came to a boiling point, with the majority deciding that in a Christian nation, there should not be any slavery... since all are equal before God.

It is chilling to imagine – it appears many of today's leaders are gleefully denying a Christian basis for our national identity. Maybe the reason for slavery's removal will be lost and some new form of slavery (or social coercion) will reappear.

Getting back to ancient times, that review of slavery in the Roman empire helps us understand how Paul and the other of that day all understood the concept of slavery.

HERE IS THE BIG QUESTION: Why would anybody, slave or free, want to think of themselves as slaves of Christ? Who could possibly WANT to be a slave?

The truth is, we all ARE slaves to somebody or something, even if we don't want to admit it. We are creatures and GOD is our creator who sent Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. We can repent and gladly acknowledge we are HIS slaves, or we can remain slaves of the evil forces that continue to tempt us and dominate our lives.

People try to deny that is what is actually happening to them. Maybe they convince themselves, or they say they do, but not many of them die peacefully.

The answer to the question is this... we sang it in our communion hymn today, *"when I survey the wondrous cross, on which the prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.... Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all"*

Saints

The unfortunate fact is the word "saint" now refers to people of exceptional holiness.

But in the Bible, it applied to anyone who is a Christian.

So, in this case, you must not use a common dictionary to genuinely understand Paul and all Christian writers.

Peter begins, "to God's elect" ... same idea, we are all blessed by God, and that makes us all special.

Saints = holy ones = set apart ones

Appears over 50 times in NT and is used by most writers.

In Gr. – set apart, called out. Idea of a special favor.

SAINTS are ALL faithful Christians.

Two great and well-known songs have it right... both by oppressed or marginalized peoples in our country...

Oh when the saints go marching in... (Negro slaves)
Come, come ye saints... (Mormon outcasts)

Slaves & saints are the same people – every Christian.

Illustration: A kindergarten teacher was helping a boy get into his cowboy boots. It was a difficult struggle, but finally she got them on. Then he said, "they are the wrong feet." Sure enough.

So she struggled again to pull back them off and put on right feet. Finally they were on.

Then the boy said, "these aren't my boots."

Again she struggled and finally got them pulled them off.

No sooner was he stocking footed again when he said, "they are my brothers boots; my mom made me wear them today."

Isn't that kinda' like the struggles some people have with being a Christian.

But it is not GOD who ever forced any person to struggle.

Jesus said, my yoke is easy. Matt 11:29-30

The wise people in the world are those who set aside personal pride and give their deepest honor and total servitude to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he shall not lose."* –Jim Elliot before his death in the jungle of So American in 1956.

And slaves all realize deep in their hearts there will always be work, difficulties, disappointments, opposition... no matter.

The yoke of Jesus is easy because none of us will ever be asked to give as much to others as HE has already given for us.

Whenever you and I feel the depth of gratitude for forgiveness that Paul did, we will happily and voluntarily count ourselves to be slaves of Jesus Christ.

Such slavery is not a limitation to the heart or soul of any person. Christians who consider themselves slaves and saints...

know that bond is the highest form of spiritual union.

Beneath the cross of Jesus, I gladly take my stand... a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way...