

PARABLES, “THROUGH PEASANTS EYES!”

Study 47, “The Obedient Servant,” Part I, Luke 17:7-10

THE OBEDIENT SERVANT: LUKE 17:7-10

1. This little p.’s significance outweighs the attention that is usually receives. In the Luke account the reader has been told that the master who returns from the GB will serve His servants. (Luke 12:35-38). In a few verses, the reader will discover that the Jesus is among His disciples; not one who sits, but one who serves (Luke 22:27). For the insensitive these texts are invitations to presumption. If Jesus came and is coming to serve us; fine; here we are, expecting to reap the benefits of his service! While in no way denying the thrust of the above p.’s. here Jesus clearly asserts his authority over His disciples. He is the master! They are His servants, and let there be no misunderstanding! Because this p. uses some of the precise imagery of the p. of the Waiting Servant in 12:35-38, that p. will need to be examined prior to our study of 17:7-10.
2. In the overall outline of the central section of Luke (Bailey) 17:1-10 appears as a miscellaneous collection of sayings on offenses, forgiveness, faith and duty. Thus we need to find no tie between this p. and the dialogue with the apostles’ that proceed it. We would rather examine it in the light of two other major discussions of the master-servant theme mentioned above. If, then, this p. is part of a miscellaneous collection, to whom is addressed?
3. The three previous paragraphs are addressed to the disciples and to the apostles. In this p. the text of Luke assumes the same audience. The phrase, “which one of you”, is used to introduce sayings to the disciples, crowds and opponents. (Bailey; Jeremias). It seems like Luke is correct and the disciples are his audience. The major argument against this view is the assumption that the disciple would not have had servants, but this is not the case. In the West having a servant puts one in the upper middle class, but not so in the East. The poorest of the poor let their children out as

servants so they can be fed, and the people of very little means have had such servants in their homes. James, John and their father, Zebedee, own a boat and have hired servants, (see Mark 1:20). Other disciples may be of similar means. Furthermore, only one servant is involved. The Herdsman/plowman is also the cook. Thus the master is a man of modest income. Applebaum writes, "Talmudic traditions assume, as a matter of course, that the ordinary man has at least on slave." (JPFC II) Also the p. does not assume that the master is a landowner. The servant may be plowing a rented field. There is no specific hint in the Gospels that the disciples were from among the poorest of the poor. Finally, the p. appeals to the audience on the bases of commonly known cultural assumptions. It does not necessarily peg the listener to a specific economic class. That is, the p. does not say, "Listen, you master of servants." Rather it says, "Does not the servant-master relationship as you know it presumes such things?"

4. The same is true on The p. of the Lost Sheep, where Jesus addresses Pharisees with the same identical introductory phrase uses here ("Which one of you, having....."). Shepherds were among the proscribed trades for the Pharisees (Bailey, Poet). Thus there were really not shepherds. In the same way Jesus is appealing, here to the common Middle Eastern understanding of how servants and masters act and is not necessarily affirming that they owned slaves or engaged servants. Thus there seems to be no remaining for questioning Luke's judgment that the p. was original addressed to the disciples/apostles.
5. The p. is a simple three stanza ballad such as we already observed in 11:9-13, 11:29-32, 15:3-7, 16:9-13, (Bailey).

(1) Can you imagine having a servant,
 Plowing or keeping sheep,
 Who on coming into the field
 You say to him, 'Come at once and recline
 to eat'?

SERVANT
 FULFILLING ORDERS
 ORDERS FULFILLED
 REWARD?

(2) Will he not rather say to him,
 'prepare for me something and I shall dine,
 And gird yourself to serve me,
 Till I eat and drink;
 And afterward you shall eat and drink'?

SERVE THE MASTER
 THEN YOURSELF

(3) Does the servant have special merit	SERVANT
Because he did what was commanded?	ORDERS FULFILLED
So, you, also when you have done what was commanded	ORDERS FULFILLED
Say, 'Nothing is owing us servants, we have one done our duty.'	REWARD?

6. As the case of Luke 15:3-7, the third stanza is application, yet it deals with a series of themes introduced in the first stanza. These themes (noted on the right) are presented in stanza one and repeated in stanza 3. They will be examined below. In the center are two couplets of parallelism.

"Prepare for me matches serve me, and I will eat and drink, parallels, you shall eat and drink." Some of the words in the central stanza seems at first glance redundant. Thus the RSV has the 1st line simply read, 'Prepare supper for me,' condensing two verbs into one. With the extra help each line this central stanza has two verbs. The 3 stanza literary form reinforces Marshall's view that there is no need to identify the 2nd stanza as redactional. In most of the p stanzas we study, direct speech occurs at the beginning of the stanza. By contrast here the first and last stanza end with direct speech. Thus the literary form is again complete, artistically satisfying, and provides an important key to interpretation.

7. Before proceeding to the interpretation of the p, we must examine the waiting servants in Luke 12:35-38. Some of the identical occur there and function in reverse of what appears here. It is not our intention to make full study of the p. of the Waiting Servants, but to observe its literary form and the use of its images. The form is as follows;

A. 1 Let your waist be girded	SERVANTS PREPARE
1' and your lamp burning	SERVANTS PREPARE
B. 2 And be like men who are waiting	SERVANTS WAIT TO SERVE
3 for their master to return to the wedding	MASTER COMES
3' So that when he comes and knocks	MASTER COMES
2' immediately they may open to him.	SERVANTS SERVE
C. 4 Blessed are those servants	SERVANTS BLESSED
5 whom the master finds awake.	MASTER COMES
6 Truly I say to you, he will gird himself.	MASTER PREPARES
7 And have them recline at table	SERVANTS HONORED
6' and come and serve them.	MASTER SERVES

5' If (In the 2nd or 3rd watch) he comes and finds thus, MASTER COMES
4' blessed are those servants SERVANTS BLESSED

8. In this case the literary form is built on a very sophisticated use of the phenomenon of the split parallelism. If all the repetitions are ignored the seven movements of the p. can be easily identified. They are as follows:
 - a. Servants prepare to serve the master.
 - b. Servants wait to serve the master.
 - c. The master's return is anticipated.
 - d. The servants are blessed in their vigilance.
 - e. The master comes.
 - f. The master prepared and serves the servants.
 - g. The servants reclined to be served.
9. By following the numbers, the flow can be easily traced. Each line/idea, except 7, is repeated. A prosaic telling of these same servant ideas without the parallel repetitions would repeat as follows. Prepare Yourselfs -(1), Wait to serve-(2), Your returning master-(3), You are blessed- (4), If the master comes and finds you awake-(5), For then he will gird himself to serve you-(6), while you recline-(7). The extra words are redundant, but part of the literary form. The split parallelism is a literary device found mainly in the OT. Freedman writes, "It is though the poet deliberately split a couplet, and inserted a variety of materials between the opening and closing halves of the unit to form a stanza." A clear case of this in the NT is the Lucan Beatitudes, Luke 6:20-26 (Bailey). There a very precise series of four couplets are formed with the key words, "Blessed and "for," that is;
Blessed are the poor
for yours is the Kingdom of God.
10. The text has three couplets structured in this fashion, but the fourth of this series has some extra material inserted in between the 1s and 2nd lines of the couplet, This is as follows;
Blessed are you when men hate you,
And when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil.
On account of the *Son of man*. Rejoice in that day and reap with joy, for your reward is in heaven. *For* so their fathers did to the prophets.