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The Bondservant

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Exodus 21:1-6; Psalm 11:6-8; Eph. 5:25-27; Phil. 2:5-8.

It is not difficult, in the light of the other passages, to see that the first six verses of Exodus 21 bring the Lord Jesus very clearly into view. The key to everything is Himself. As we look for Him we shall have the explanation of those things which are otherwise only things on the surface, merely laws and commandments and so forth. Our object in looking for the Lord Jesus is very quickly reached in these six verses, for there is little doubt but that this Hebrew bondservant is a type of the Lord Jesus. We have read that He took the form of a bondservant.

In the first place we have the six years of compulsory service on the part of this Hebrew servant. Once having been brought into service, he is bound by the law to serve for six years. The law demands six years' service, so that six years here is a type, a representation, of the government of the law and the demands of the law.

We read of the Lord Jesus that He was "made under the law", and that the very first aspect or phase of the servanthood of the Lord Jesus, as the Servant of Jehovah, is to satisfy the law wholly, to come under the law's righteous demands right up to the last moment of their authority. Six years is a fixed period, a fixed range, a fixed limit; not a bit less than that time can he serve. There is the exacting of the law. The Lord Jesus, made under the law as the Servant of the Lord, fulfilled all the requirements of the law and satisfied God utterly in every respect.

He stood at last at the point where the law had no more claim upon Him. It was a tremendous thing to exhaust all the demands of the law and stand at last in the place where He could say: "That law has been wrought out to the full by Me, and that being so, it has no more power over Me; I am

altogether in a position of power so far as the law is concerned, and it is not the master any longer." The law was no longer the master because of the righteous claims and legal claims of the master having been fulfilled. When a master's full demands have been met, and the master has no more that he can claim, then the master is put altogether in the second place of authority, he is made subject. The one who has fulfilled all his possible requirements is in the position of advantage. The Lord Jesus, having accepted that position, and now being above the law, has the law under His feet. He is Master of the law, the law has no claim over Him.

In Christ Jesus, because of that position which He occupies, we through grace are free from the law, the law is no longer our master.

That is where we begin with the fulfilled law right up to the last day in this service of the Lord Jesus, and there is a sense in which God, who gave the law, is perfectly satisfied so far as His legal position is concerned, when He has One who wholly fulfils His law.

There are two views of God. There is the view of God as a Master who exacts all His dues, who claims all His rights, who stands to His demands to the last iota. But that is only one view. That brings in the somewhat more coldly legal side of God. He must be that because of His nature, His righteousness, His holiness. He cannot accept a lower and lesser position than that, and He lays claim and stands to His claim to be fully satisfied on the matter of righteousness. The Lord Jesus has answered that side of the Divine requirements of God. But there is another way, a second way, and another side from which to view God. God has interests which are far bigger than the interests of a merely legal position. That has to do with His nature, and He cannot change His nature and come down from the level of His nature; therefore He must have all righteousness fulfilled. But there is something more than the righteous nature of God: there are those great interests of His, those purposes of His which are very much bigger. He is not only one of a certain kind, He is one with great purposes, large purposes, He has a household, and for His household He has great interests, and these interests require a devoted, willing, free, disinterested service. These interests have got to be served not under compulsion, for they are the interests of grace. The large interests of God can never be served by anybody who is a bondservant under the law. There are much larger interests than the interests which lie under the law. There is a great household, there is a great church, there are the great purposes of His heart bound up with His church; not just the satisfying of His own nature but the fulfilling of all His great generous purposes for His church, His household, and these require another kind of service.

If the Lord Jesus had stopped short at the fulfilling of the law, the really great things of God would never have been fulfilled. God would have been satisfied, the service would have been realised, and He could go. What has God got? He has one who has satisfied Him, and He has His law fulfilled. But that is only the beginning, it is not the end. That opens the door for some more. When He has fulfilled the law of God is that all? It is not just that God can now go away and say, "I have got all I ever had a right to, and all I intended to have, and I am going now to live in satisfaction"? No, that is only the beginning of things. God says, in effect, "Because I have that, now all My wider interests are possible, all My greater things can be realised."

So it is through the very one who has done the six years that all the meaning of the seventh year and afterwards is possible. The Lord Jesus, having fulfilled the six years, or the law, as a bondservant, was free; He had a right now to be released. He can claim His release.

When He came to the Mount of Transfiguration, having fulfilled all the law in His own person, and the Father could there attest, "This is My beloved Son", He could go into glory, He has fulfilled the

law, He can be glorified and go through into glory. But now there comes in something voluntary. The way of the cross from that point was not laid upon Him under compulsion. In the Mount of Transfiguration He made the greatest of all the decisions, the real decision. In all that it meant, this decision was brought home in a way in which it had never been brought home before. Here is the glory! You can have it right on the spot and go into heaven; and in the very presence of the glory is the cross. A cross is there at that point. Moses and Elijah spoke to Him of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. He was accepting, in the presence of the glory, something beyond the demands of the law. He was accepting the higher interests of the Lord, the greater interests of that great household of faith. So He moves from the Servant under the law to be the Servant under the seventh year. He goes beyond six unto the seven of spiritual perfection, the perfection of spiritual devotion, not legal devotion; not legal compulsion, but voluntary abandonment.

It is all of love. "I love..." The law does not know anything about that word. That is a word that is foreign to the law. "Thou shalt" leaves no room for love. "Thou shalt not" has no place for love. Those two expressions and love stand altogether in two different realms, in relation to two different things. "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" relates to the holiness of God. Defy that and you will be destroyed. "Lest we die", said Israel. So this bondsman of God goes beyond the six and into the seventh of voluntary devotion, the devotion of love.

The devotion is first of all to the Master, His Father. Then, note in this story, it is then to the bondsman's wife and children. "I love my master (that is the first thing. It comes first, and it is something in itself) my wife and my children". Yes, they come in. Here we have a faint reflection of Ephesians 5:25: "As Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for it". This Servant who can go free, take His liberty, fulfil everything that had been legally required of Him and go out, free from obligation, under the righteous ordinance of God, abandons that, surrenders that, firstly for the Master and then for His wife and children.

The Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration let go what was His by right at that moment; He let it go in love, first for the Father, because of the Father's greater interests than just being satisfied on the matter of righteousness; and He let it go for us.

There is a word here which is full of significance "If he came in by himself he shall go out by himself." That verse is not perfectly translated from the Hebrew. The literal translation of the verse is, "If he come in with his body". It sounds strange to our ears. But if you remember, "A body hath Thou prepared for Me..." "This is My body which is for you" you understand. If He comes in with His body and fulfils in His body the demands of the law, He is at liberty to go out with His body. But supposing love says, "I will give my body beyond the demands of the law" that is, "Thou hast provided Me this body in which I can be wholly abandoned, not only to the demands of the law but to the interests of God." "As Christ loved the church and gave Himself..." Then there is that little clause at the end, "So ought husbands to love their wives as their own bodies". If He comes in with His body and fulfils all the obligations, He can take it out and have it for Himself, use it for Himself, be free with His body to do what He likes. His alternative is to give His body to his Master's higher interests and for the sake of His Bride, His wife, His church, He gave Himself for her. "This is My body which is for you." It is the devotion of love.

If he shall do this then his master shall lead him to the doorpost, "and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl". The bored ear is the mark of the servant in perpetuity.

The Lord Jesus has done a wonderful thing. Psalm 40 gives us the full setting: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not (that is the law, the way of the law) Lo, I am come... to do Thy will". Not just to

fulfil the law but "to do Thy will". Oh, what a will! It is an all-comprehensive will. The will of God is bigger than the law; it is an infinitely bigger thing. "Mine ear hast thou bored (digged)". The two things go together. The Servant who goes beyond the law and gives Himself anew in willing, free, disinterested abandonment to His Master does not do it for Himself but for that large will, that great will, to be in that will, to serve that will. What is the will of God? It is a big thing. One little thing is: "This is the will of God, even our sanctification." But the will of God is a great thing related to the church. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God" - "Mine ear hast thou bored". You see the abandonment of love to the will of God concerning the church, the Body, the wife.

Jesus has done a big thing. What has He done? He existed in God-form, He took the form of a bondsman, and that form of a bondsman meant that He came under the law to fulfil it, and when He had fulfilled the law He was free from His bondsman position. What might He have done then? The bondsman position and condition no longer obtained with Him of necessity; that is, legally; He could have gone back to the glory and been the Eternal Son again outside of bondsman service. What has He done? He has accepted Servanthood in eternal perpetuity, He is still God's Servant, He is still serving now, He still bears the marks of His devotion to the will of God in His hands and His feet. If we could see spiritually we should see the bored ear still. He is still standing, He is still serving, "He ever lives to make intercession." He is still serving the church and He is going on serving for ever. He has given Himself to everlasting service when He might have been altogether free from that and been the Son alone.

You have to ask the question: for how long does the seventh year last? Is there any time limit? It says, "for ever". Is the Lord Jesus the Servant of the Lord for ever? "He shall serve him for ever" is the word in this passage. That is a tremendous revelation of what the Lord Jesus in love has accepted, not only love for the Father, for He could love the Father as the Son and not the Servant. This is love for the Father's purposes, which are the purposes of grace for a household. Why a Servant? Not just that God should have a Servant to wait on Him, but that God should have one to serve His household, His great establishment. It is the establishment that is introduced in the letter to the Hebrews.

"Christ as a Son over God's house". There is the household brought in. "Holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling". "He is not ashamed to call them brethren". "I and the children whom God hath given Me". "My wife and my children". It is a family matter that He is devoted to.

It is a tremendous thing to realise that the Lord Jesus, while He can love the Father just as truly and deeply as the Eternal Son, has shown a particular kind of love for the Father in the Father's interests and concerns for His household, and that has involved Him in continuous Servanthood, abandonment for ever. It is one position to be a servant; it is another position to be that for ever. He is the Son. He is crowned with glory and honour. He is Lord of all. But let us remember that there remains this wonderful other side, that He is serving. The word is, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...". That is, we must be truly servant-minded in the spirit of love. That is the cure for discord and strain in relationships, the servant spirit governed by love. This is the mind of Christ, the true servant spirit, prompted, inspired by love for God and devotion to His interests in His house. What a cure for difficulties that is!

May the Lord find that spirit in us.