

# Living Under Jesus' Lordship-Part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hey, good morning, everybody. Me and Kirk are apparently in a war to see who can give each other the more awkward nickname.! But the problem is neither one of us are very good at it.

So you're going to get to watch that on full display, I guess, every week. So, hey, welcome, everybody. My name is Elliot. Again, so good to be with you here at City Grace this morning. As Kirk said, we're going to be continuing in the book of Colossians this morning.

We're being in Colossians chapter 3. So if you've got your Bibles, you can turn there. If not, no worries. It's going to be on the screen behind me. And we are in the middle of a passage in the book of Colossians that is really describing to this church, and by extension to us today, what it means to live under Jesus' lordship.

And last week we looked at, you know, what that would mean in some of our most intimate family relationships. And as we said last week, this is just a segment of Scripture that has some areas in it that are kind of guaranteed to make us uncomfortable at the first read.

And that was certainly a little bit the case last week. And as promised, this week is going to be even more so. Okay? So maybe just to repeat a few things we talked about last week as we kind of move into a passage like this, just some prefacing notes.

[ 1 : 16 ] The first thing is whenever we come to something that's hard in the Bible or that strikes us wrong the first time we read it, the thing we always like to say is we move into this unafraid of our Bible.

You don't have to be afraid or embarrassed of the Bible. I trust who Jesus is. I trust what I know about him. And I trust there is something here, even if I don't understand it, that God wants me to know through it.

But also, when you come to a verse in the Bible that's difficult, you're allowed to wrestle with it.

You're allowed to ask questions about it, to work through it, to say, I don't understand that.

That sounds wrong to me. To seek out what it actually means. That's what we've come together to do is gather around God's Word and understand what he wanted this church all these years ago to know and what he wants us to know.

And like any topic in Scripture, there's just no way we can cover everything there is to say about a difficult section of Scripture in one sitting. And so, while we're always going to strive to be faithful to this, one sermon is never the last word.

[ 2 : 24 ] And indeed, there is almost no limit to the faithful commentary that followers of Jesus have written over the years as they wrestle with difficult verses and try to understand what God wants them to know.

And so, same deal this week. We're going to dive in trusting that God has got something. We're going to pick back up where we did last week. We're going to start in Colossians 3, 17, because that really is the framing for this entire section.

It says there, And then against that backdrop, after talking to husbands and wives about what their covenantal relationship, what that means for that, and parents and children, Paul then turns his attention to something that would have been very prescient and familiar to this audience, but also to us is really stark and concerning.

And he says, Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

[ 3 : 47 ] For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. And then in chapter 4, Masters, treat your bond servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also

have a master in heaven.

This is God's word to us. Now obviously, for us to even engage these verses, we've got a little bit of work to do up front because this is going to strike us completely differently than it did the original audience at first hearing.

So to start, we kind of need to look at this term, bond servants. The Greek word that is rendered here in the ESV translation, bond servants, is probably most naturally to the readers of that time rendered slaves.

And indeed, in many translations, you'll see it read just that same way today. So this verse is often translated, slaves, obey your earthly masters.

Now the ESV isn't really trying to hide the ball here in the sense of they're just trying to soften the wording because it's offensive or embarrassing. What they're really trying to do is just attend to a reality for a modern audience that when we hear the word slaves, we are inevitably just going to have a different understanding of that term than the original readers.

[ 5 : 11 ] Because for us, there's simply no way we can hear the word slaves and not immediately think of the race-based, chattel-type slavery because of its impact in modern America and our history.

And so what the translators are trying to do is simply note that there is some difference in this system of bond servanthood in that it wasn't race-based. It was usually due to some kind of debt. Some people entered into it voluntarily. There were some rules around it in different parts of the Roman Empire. Oftentimes, it wasn't for life. Like there were ways that you could get out of that debt.

You could often gain your freedom. And it was something that was very familiar to them, both from the Greco-Roman world they were living in and from the ancient world, including ancient Israel. And because of that, it would be fair to say that there are significant differences from that institution and slavery as we understand it.

That would probably be a fair statement. It would also be fair to say that there are a lot of kind of modalities between this bond servanthood that do look kind of like our modern boss-employee relationship, which is why often when people come to this, they preach it like that because they're reaching for something that we would understand and beyond something we would consider unjust.

[ 6 : 34 ] But because of that, while those are both fair to say, it would also be fair to say we would not tolerate this arrangement. Life bondage, effectively being a prisoner, being an indentured servant because you owe money, isn't an institution we would consider just.

And so Paul's writing this letter to believers in a world they lived in, but we no longer live in. And because of that, we've got to get past how we initially see it to see if there's anything that's still relevant for us.

And I think that is critical because I do think there is something God wanted the Colossian church to know, and he wants us to know. But if we're going to engage it, you really have to talk about the elephant in the room, right?

Because we're going to have to take a side road and talk about kind of the two things that immediately appear in our mind when we come to a verse like this in Scripture. And the first one, I think, is this.

Regardless of anything else, why doesn't Paul, and as a matter of fact, why doesn't Jesus just say, slavery is bad, full stop? Like, why doesn't he say that here?

[ 7 : 44 ] That's a question we've got to answer. And maybe even more concerning for us is not the fact that he's just not making commentary, but how could you then go the next mile and effectively instruct that person to just bear up under it, just be a good servant and lay down to this?

Easy for you to say, Paul. How dare you do that? Now, as the first part of that, we covered some of this last week just in the fact of whether we want it to be or not, Paul's purpose in this letter simply isn't to make societal commentary.

He's not making a podcast. This is a lot more like writing a personal letter to a friend. He's not trying to make a sweeping statement about all of society in that time.

He's addressing believers about what it looks like to live in all aspects of life, including the brokenness of the world they lived in. And I certainly don't think from that you could infer that Paul had nothing to say.

Like, if you ask Paul directly, I don't think there's anything in Scripture that would say he would kind of just nod and affirm and say, you know, the economic system of bondservanthood found throughout the world, it's good and just, and it's the right way of the world.

[ 9 : 07 ] I just don't see anything in Scripture that convinces me Paul would say that. But he doesn't say it here. And that bothers us. I would argue Jesus actually got that a lot as well.

We said this before, but I think it bears repeating. It is really just impossible for us in our minds to conceive for Jews living in first century Judea how prescient and urgent the issue of the Roman occupation was.

And we wouldn't be any different if there was a foreign power holding our country and oppressing us and taxing us and taking advantage of our families.

It would be the thing we wanted somebody to say something about. And throughout his ministry, you see people pressing Jesus on us. Jesus, is now the time you're gonna kick the Romans out? Jesus, you're gonna say something about this tax now, right? The tax. And over and over again, he just won't engage them on that level.

[ 10 : 17 ] And you kind of get the impression that, not that Jesus doesn't care about it. And again, not that Jesus has any problems speaking his mind or saying what's unjust. It just looks like, in a lot of ways, Jesus actually considers that trivial compared to what he's here to do.

I also don't think that means that you can imply anything from here that it's wrong to courageously try to extend the realities of God's kingdom into the world around you as God gives you opportunity and grace.

I mean, it is certainly true that throughout history, there have been slave masters who have used verses like this to try to keep people in bondage. But it is also very true that it is not hard to find the gospel thread and abolition movements throughout history.

Based largely around the fact that as they looked in scripture, they saw that this doesn't affirm owning another human because people are made in God's image and they're meant to belong to him alone.

They didn't see the Bible or their Christian faith as an impediment to their goal to end slavery. They found it the motivation, the fuel. And even in this kind of slightly different situation of bond servanthood where again, we want commentary on the situation.

[ 11 : 37 ] And we're gonna discuss today that there are some other passages in scripture where you can get some illumination about it. We want the commentary, but at the end of the day, Paul's not making commentary on an institution.

It's a personal letter to believers in Colossae. And the fact is that both then and now, people have life-binding obligations or obstacles and Paul wants to speak into that.

As to the second question, how can Paul just tell people to simply obey? I think what I would say here is, again, whatever else you think about what Paul is doing here, you can't claim Paul is a hypocrite because he does in fact have some experience in this area.

Paul is often found throughout his missionary journeys imprisoned for the gospel. And I'm sure he didn't think his imprisonment or the laws and authorities that brought that imprisonment about were good or just.

I don't think he would have affirmed those things. But, and I'm also sure both in our mind and his, he could imagine if I wasn't locked up in this jail cell, what are all the other things I could be accomplishing?

[ 12 : 53 ] All the places I could be spreading the good news, all the churches I could be planning. But the interesting thing is, even though that is a constant reality in Paul's life, he just doesn't spend his letters to the churches railing against the system.

And much like Jesus, Paul just seems to have this stance of, there is absolutely nothing you can do to stop what God wants to accomplish in me.

And if being in jail is where I'm at right now, not that worried about it. So as we noted at the beginning, again, there's just, there's no way to satisfactorily cover, again, all that you could say or write about that.

And if you're interested, there's a lot of good commentaries that wrestled with that over the years. I would also argue, like we always do, you have to take the full conscious of scripture. If you come to scripture and you read something like that, you also need to go back to when Jesus started his ministry.

And the first thing he does, like the first thing he does is open up a scroll to where the prophet Isaiah says, I have come to set captives free.

[14:03] Like that also tells you something about the heart of God. But for the rest of this morning, I think our task is simply to try to understand the intent and meaning as it was written and to indeed see if there's anything we could take away from it.

And I think there is because just like last week, as we read, the entire heading, the entire kind of ethos for this section is the same. Do everything in the name of Jesus.

Which means that what Paul is really saying in this passage to both those who are under authority and those with authority is your life is ultimately lived for an audience of one.

Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive your inheritance. You are serving the Lord Christ.

[15:14] Christ. I think one of the reasons other than just embarrassment and not wanting to deal with it that this segment often gets compared to like kind of an employee and boss relationship in our time is that while this doesn't exist, there are certainly obligations that still mirror it.

For those of you who are kind of on that Dave Ramsey kick, one of his favorite verses is what? Proverbs 22.7. The borrower is slave to the lender.

And what he's trying to get you to see is that debt is the type of thing even in our own time where you're somewhat trapped. Like if you are in debt to someone, they have something over you and whether you're kind of on that train of I'm going to use credit cards or not, it's certainly true that most of us have experienced a debt.

Either something you borrowed money for or just the fact that you need money and you go to work every day and you owe them labor. And there is a consequence to the fact that if you don't pay that obligation, you don't get something.

You can't escape from that reality. Part of what Paul wants you to know is the way in which you navigate those situations can certainly reflect Jesus.

[16:32] Years ago, my first paid job when I was 16 years old through high school in college was bagging groceries at a local grocery store. And I did that for the massive life-changing wage of \$4.35 an hour.

It was also in a time when uniforms weren't as casual. Like it wasn't like comfy casual or anything like that. I had to wear like the slacks and the tie and like the awful green smock.

I mean it's literally like if you've ever seen the end of the Shawshank Redemption where like they let the convicts out and that's what they have to wear. That was my uniform. Like literally that exact uniform. Right? It was not fun. And like any service job the customer is shall we say a complicated burden to bear sometimes.

Because you need them to buy things or the store doesn't exist but obviously some people just like to boss other people around when they feel like they can. And if those are the only factors you could see in a job like that it is easy to understand how you might give yourself permission not to perform your best.

I am paid the very bare minimum wage. I hate my uniform. There is nothing cool about this uniform. Customers are ungrateful and bossy.

[17:56] I am not going to I am going to loaf around. Right? Like there is nothing here that is like inspiring me to work. But these verses show you that a believer's obligation is never truly to a person or an institution.

When you play your game you play it for Jesus alone. And again this isn't intended to be commentary on what job you should work.

It is in fact a blessing that we largely live in a place that you have some options. If it's terrible you can move on to another job. You can negotiate higher wages. There is nothing wrong with that. But at a very core level what you do how you serve how you work how you pay off obligations how you earn your pay isn't primarily about what is fair or what benefit it has to you.

Paul says you show the world that you trust Jesus by working as if your service is always for him. You greet every customer like they are Jesus.

[19:02] You make every deal like it's Jesus. I mean do you really want to rip off Jesus like say I got one over on Jesus. You show the world Jesus is Lord by a posture of the heart that says to the

world my ultimate reward isn't about what I get here.

Jesus has said I have an inheritance irrespective of what you do. My inheritance is because I'm a child of the king. And that means you're just running a completely different race from the entire world like the race you run is not ran in the same way that they do.

It also means that it allows you to do something else that I would say feels very counterintuitive and countercultural. It means you can trust the outcomes in your life to God.

It says for the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality. You know we talked last week about the complexity of how just the reality is sin makes everything in the world harder.

And because of that it is true in this world that sometimes things like for justice to exist for evil to be held at bay you need things like courts and justice systems.

[ 20 : 26 ] Again that's not God's intent for his people. In 1 Corinthians Paul discusses this issue that's happening in the Corinthian church of believers are taking each other they're filing lawsuits against each other in these pagan courts.

And he says you're not why are you doing that and look he doesn't intend that to be like an absolute restriction but the point he is trying to make is if two believers have gotten to the place where you need an ungodly court to adjudicate between you you've already lost.

Like something has gone terribly wrong as fellow travelers with Jesus. What Paul's trying to get across here is it is not your prerogative as a follower of Jesus to make sure justice is meted out in every situation in your life.

And in fact I would argue if you kind of have a disposition that is tilted towards I'm going to get mine like I am not going to suffer any wrong without retribution.

If you come at me I'm going to come at you twice as hard that is behaving a lot more like a mob member than a follower of Jesus. You have to be able to entrust your life to God.

[ 21 : 54 ] And really I think if you want to understand kind of the entire ethos again that Paul is trying to instill it's really this idea regardless of your circumstance or station nothing can stop you from being everything Jesus wants you to be.

There's another area of scripture where Paul speaks specifically to bond servants in 1 Corinthians 7 he says this were you a bond servant when Jesus called you do not be concerned about it but if you can gain your freedom avail yourself of the opportunity for he who was called in the Lord as a bond servant is a freed man in the Lord and likewise he who was free when he called is now a bond servant of Christ you were bought with a price do not become the bond servants of men so brothers in whatever condition each was called let him remain with God you know again I think this is one of those verses where Paul shows he has no affinity for the system of bond!

servanthood He doesn't say submit to! as the proper and good institution He says in point of fact if you can get yourself out of that avail yourself of the opportunity and I don't think it would be too much of a stretch to you could add on to that and if you can work to help others get out of unjust things do that as well but if you can't if you can't He wants them to know your circumstance or your station is not what defines you you belong to Jesus not to men nothing can stop you from being what God has called you I know at first glance that might seem like it's a million miles away from our daily lives but I would argue it's it's really not that far all of us have something in our life that we think is holding us back from everything we could be if it just wasn't there

Elliot I'm a mom with young kids and frankly it just seems like I don't have time or energy to do anything I have all these good ideas I want to pray I want to do all these things but man every day is if this could just be a little different I could really be serving the Lord Elliot my family doesn't have any money I can't contribute meaningfully to anything it seems like and it feels like every day the only thing I can think about is how do I pay this next bill how do I get over this next financial hurdle and I feel like if that just wasn't there think of all the things I could be doing if I didn't have to work all the time just to make ends meet Elliot I'm dealing with an injury or an illness or a handicap and just honestly it feels like that's all I do and I'm not really of any use to the church interestingly

Paul actually had that same thing he spent his whole life with some kind of thorn in the flesh that we don't know what it was and Paul desperately felt like man if you could just get rid of this think of what I could do Elliot I'm a teenager nobody listens to me what difference can I make family doesn't take me seriously the church doesn't take me seriously Paul wants you to know no station no circumstance no barrier no lack that can keep you from being everything God has made you to be because it does not rest on your competence or capability but God's grace his faithfulness you

know where Paul is when he writing this letter to the Colossians take a wild guess jail pretty par for the course he's in jail in

[ 26 : 13 ] Rome like so many other times in his life it just doesn't seem to phase him okay he doesn't want to be in jail but if you throw him in jail cool I'll preach to your guards and they'll become Christians I'll write letters that'll spread the gospel all had this magic cloak where just the brutality of this nothing could stop him it was like he was living in a different kingdom I think it also starts to give you insight into how Jesus lived that same life when Jesus says things like look I have bread that you guys know nothing about it's not just a metaphor like Jesus is saying my resources my reality my kingdom is full like all these things you guys are worried about small compared to what

I've got and that's not just some mental spiritual exercise for that look it's hard to do like that's why we pursue discipleship and kingdom life but I can tell you the truth if you meet someone living like that the world takes notice because it looks odd when you have a disposition that whatever condition I'm with I'm going to remain with God you you cannot separate me from him you're really beyond the ability of this world to destroy you anymore just like last week it's not just the servants that God has something to say to he's got something to say to the masters in authority as well Paul wants them to know that believers in authority are under authority as well masters treat your bond servants justly and fairly knowing that you also have a master in heaven again

I know it's not so for us because we look back through the lens of all the ages of history but for the original hearers of this letter that was actually again probably the most radical part the idea that a master had any obligation to his bond servant other than executing their will and fulfilling the debt probably raised some eyebrows in their day and again incidentally I think this is one of those places as well where it may not be obvious on first read but when you start to think about it a statement like that really kind of starts to subvert the whole system right because Paul is effectively saying to masters what mediates your relationship and the authority you have is not what is allowable by society it is not what the laws of society and the place you live in says it is Jesus which means I don't care what the Romans say you don't get to be wicked you don't get to extract every penny it kind of makes you wonder how many masters over the years under the command to treat their slaves as brothers in

Christ and thinking on what Christ did for them may have simply just said you know what your debt is forgiven the same thing if you live in our day you have employees they have an obligation to you but you have an obligation to them and you have a master in heaven I think that extends to just again how we do life you're selling a car you're selling a house like the goal of a Christian is never how do I maximally extract money how do I you know I'm going to rejoice when I can say man I took them up the river it's okay to do fair deals and to make profit but your goal is never just that I get the best end of the deal it's did I glorify Jesus in my dealings did I use my authority in a way that tells the world there is a better and good king!

the thing that mediates whatever relationship you're in is not the policy book it's not the laws of society it's not power dynamics it's Jesus you have a master as well and his direction to you is you only get to wield authority in a manner that is consistent with the glory of his name and there is a way to live in the kingdom no matter where you find yourself in this world which really brings us back to where we started do everything in the name of Jesus I am so very grateful that these institutions of slavery and bond servanthood don't exist anymore it is a good thing that we are able to live in a time when those are gone and we should celebrate it but even today there's no way around this living under Jesus lordship is just a radical way to live in this world and if you do you're going to be criticized for it you're going to be called weak you're going to be called a doormat people are not going to understand how you live life you are going to stand out and in doing so you are also going to shine the light of the gospel and that's the call that

[ 32 : 07 ] Jesus has for us today as the band comes up if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus I guess I would just say whatever you've heard about followers Jesus whatever you've experienced when we're getting it really right as being like Jesus told us to be it does look like we're playing a different game like you'll know it I mean if we you have a right to look at us and say if you look like everybody else if you're just as mean if you're just as self centered then how does that reflect!

Jesus and you're right that's not what Jesus calls Christians to do but when we're getting it right it does look like we're playing our game we're living our life from a position of security and trust that we are loved and we are forgiven and because of that we just don't count our circumstances as the

most important thing it doesn't mean we don't work to get rid of evil things or unjust things but we're also not captive to them and I know there's a lot in a verse like this to distract from that central truth today but I'll simply say this if you are tired of playing the game as everyone else in the world does if you long for something different Jesus says there is something different there is a different kind and quality of life that can be experienced through him if you want to know about that today there'll be a prayer on the screen maybe that's a way you can express it or if you want to talk to a pastor we'll be down front would love to just chat with you about that

Jesus wants to show you that the same way that everybody else lives isn't how you have to live if you are a follower of Jesus I think the message for us is pretty much the same as to the Colossians what have you convinced yourself has to change in your life before you can be fully effective for Jesus what roadblock or hindrance or limitation have you ingested as this is the most true thing about me this is the most true thing about my life I think the call is is it possible for you to trust God today when he says there is nothing that can keep you from being everything I want you to be again doesn't mean we can't pray to our good father lord take this thorn away lord if this cup can pass let it pass lord bring goodness and blessing to me and my family very appropriate prayers but if the roadblock doesn't move can you trust that maybe it doesn't matter as much as you think it does I give you a few minutes you can you can take and pray that before the Lord if you're a follower of Jesus when you're ready you can come and take communion we testify when we take this cup and this cracker representing Jesus blood and his body the fact that again the greatest roadblock wasn't anything we see in this world the greatest roadblock was that we were separated from God that was the thing that mattered and that was the thing that Jesus had his eyes fully on when he came to this world because he knew nothing matters until you're restored to the father and when you are nothing matters but that you are restored to the father and so when you come to the table you can take that it's a testament to your heart that Jesus paid it all the thing that was the hardest stain to remove the thing that was really going to separate from me from

God has been dealt with who else can stop the Lord what else in your life would ever be as great as that father we give you this moment Jesus I pray you will just do whatever you want to do in hearts we come and seek you God I just pray!

[ 36 : 33 ] Spirit you will help us to see and convince us that you are the most important thing that there is no one or nothing that can stand against you God I do pray for the injustice in this world the places where darkness and slavery and evil things still exist people are still caught in that God may you give us the grace to fight for them it's a blessing father that we can be part of your kingdom and everything Jesus let your glory be shown in this world in Jesus name to