

THE SLAVERY THAT IS LOVE—THE SACRED JOY OF SERVING AND SACRIFICING

By Commissioner S. L. Brengle

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus.

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ.

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ.

Paul, a servant of God.

Thus boldly and proudly wrote James and Jude and Peter and Paul in an age when labour and service were a badge of inferiority and shame. That age with its false standards and corrupt glories was doomed and dying, and these early followers of Christ stood on the threshold, and were ushering in a new era in which service was to become a badge of royalty and a distinguishing mark of the sons of God and the citizens of heaven upon earth. The word servant as used by them meant a slave. They counted themselves slaves of God and of Christ.

The word and the relationship seem harsh and forbidding, but not so when we realize its meaning to these Apostles. They were love-slaves. The bondage that enthralled them was the unbreakable bondage of love.

There was a law among the Hebrews that for sore poverty or debt or crime one man might become the servant of another, but he could not be held in servitude beyond a certain period; at the end of six years he must be allowed to go free. (Exodus 21:1-6; Deuteronomy 15:12-17). But if he loved his master and preferred to remain with him as his slave, then the master in the presence of judges was to place the man against a door or door-post, and bore a hole through his ear, and this was to be the mark that he was his master's servant for ever.

Love's Willing, Glad Slavery

It was not the slavery of compulsion and law, but the willing and glad slavery of love. And this was the voluntary attitude of Paul and of Jude, of Peter and James. Jesus had won them by love. They had sat at the feet of the Great Servant of Love, who came not to be served but to serve, to minister to others, to give His life a ransom for all. They had seen Him giving Himself to the poor, the weary, the heavy laden, the vile, the sinful, and the unthankful. They had seen His blessed life outpoured—

Like the rush of a river,

Wasting its waters for ever and ever

Amid burnt sands that reward not the giver.

They had seen Him 'wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities,' chastised for our peace, and stricken that we might be healed, and their hearts had been bowed and broken by His great love; henceforth they were His bond-slaves, no longer free to come and go as they pleased, but only as He willed, for the adamant chains of love held them, and the burning passion of love constrained them. Such bondage and service became to them the most perfect liberty. Their only joy was to do those things that were pleasing in His sight. Set at liberty to do this their freedom was complete, for he only is free who is permitted to do always that which pleases him. The love slave has no pleasure like that

of serving his master. This is his joy, and his very 'crown of rejoicing.'

Love's Bondage

The love-slave is altogether at his master's service. He is all eyes for his master. He watches. He is all ears for his master. He listens. His mind is willing. His hands are ready. His feet are swift. To sit at the master's feet and look into his loved face; to listen to his voice and catch his words; to run on his errands; to do his bidding; to share his privations and sorrows; to watch at his door; to guard his honour to praise his name; to defend his person; to seek and promote his interests, and, if needs be, to die for his dear sake, this is the joy of the slave of love, and this he counts his perfect freedom.

A fine black fellow was placed on a slave block in an Egyptian slave market. His master was selling him. Men were bidding for him. A passing Englishman stopped, looked, listened, and began to bid. The slave saw him and knew that the Englishman was a world-traveller. He thought that if the Englishman bought him, he would be taken from Egypt, from friends and loved ones, and that he would never see them any more. So he cursed the Englishman, raving and swearing and tugging at his chain that he might reach and crush him. But the Englishman, unmoved, at last out-bid all others and the slave was sold to him. He paid the price, received the papers that made the slave his property, and then handed them to the black man.

"Take these papers; you are free," he said. "I bought you that I might give you your freedom."

The slave looked at his deliverer and his ravings ceased. Tears flooded his eyes, as, falling at the Englishman's feet and embracing his knees, he cried, 'O, sir, let me be your slave for ever. Take me to the ends of the earth. Let me serve you till I die!'

Love had won his heart, and now love constrained him, and he felt there could be no joy like serving a master.

We see many illustrations of this bondage of love in our daily life. Surely it is the glory and joy of the true wife. She would rather suffer hardship and poverty in a Kansas dugout, with the husband she loves, than live in a palace surrounded by every luxury with any other.

This bondage of love is, at one and the same time, the slavery and the freedom of the true mother. Offer such a mother gold and honours and pleasure, and she will spurn them all for the sacred joy of serving and sacrificing for her child.

This also is the true freedom and service of the Christian.

"My yoke is easy, and My burden is light," said Jesus. And this is His easy yoke and light burden. His yoke is the yoke of love, and it is easy. Love makes it easy. His burden is the burden of love, and it is light. Love makes it light.

Giving Wings to the Soul

To the sinner the yoke looks intolerable, the burden looks unbearable. But to those who have entered into the secret of the Master, His yoke is the badge of freedom, and His burden gives wings to the soul.

This is Holiness. It is wholeness of consecration and devotion. It is singleness of eye. It is perfect love which casts out fear. The love slave does not fear the master, for he joys in the master's will. "Not My will, but Thine be done;" "Though He slay me, yet will

I trust Him," says the slave of love. There can be no fear where there is such love.

This is heart purity accomplished by the expulsive power of a new and overmastering affection and purpose. Sin and selfishness are consumed in the hot fires of this great love. Hallelujah!

This is religion made easy. This is God's Kingdom come, and His will done, on earth as it is done in Heaven. For what more can the angels do than to serve God with this unselfishness and passionate love?

"Yea, if I be Offered Up"

The love-slave is gentle and forbearing and kind to all the children of the household and to all the other slaves—for the sake of his master. Are they not dear and valuable to him for the master's sake. And he is ready to lay down his life to serve them even as to serve the master. Such was the spirit of Paul when he wrote, 'Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.' (Philippians 2:17). And so likewise was it the spirit of beautiful Queen Esther when, in uttermost consecration for the salvation of her people, she sent word to Mordecai, 'So will I go unto the king, which is not according to law; and if I perish, I perish.' (Esther 4:16).

This slave of love counts not his life dear unto himself. (Acts 20:24). It belongs to his master. The interests of the master are his interests. He has no other. He wants no other. He will have no other. He cannot be bribed by gold or honours. He would rather suffer and starve for his master than feast at another's table. Like Ruth, he says, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." (Ruth 1:16-17).

You Must Choose

Do you ask, "How shall I enter into this sweet and gentle and yet all powerful bondage of love?" I answer, by your own choice and by God's revelation of Himself to your soul. If your love to Him now is a very poor and powerless thing, it is because you do not know Him; you do not draw near enough to see the beauty of Him.

My God, how beautiful Thou art! is the language of a soul which is learning to know Him. Then comes the realization—

Thou hast stooped to ask of me,

The love of my poor heart.

To the men of this world He is not beautiful, for they have not sought to see Him. Let Him show Himself to you that you may fall in love with Him. St. Paul had seen His glory and been blinded by it. The other Apostles had lived with Him, and walked at His side. They loved Him because they knew Him so well.

For this reason they could make the great decision. Like Moses they "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." So you must choose. The choice must be complete and it must be final. Then as a love slave you must wait upon the Master. If He is silent to you, watch. When He speaks to you, listen.

(Continued on Page 8)