

Paradox

Of the many figures of speech Jesus used in His teaching, more people are confused by the paradox than any other figurative language form. It caused a problem for Nicodemus in John 3, as Jesus introduced the "new birth." The statement of two opposite or incongruent things as equal or necessary usually generates thinking on the subject. In scripture, a paradox is most often used to illustrate the difference between physical and spiritual topics and applications. Meditation on the physical subject discussed and its relation to God, His domain, and the spiritual life points out that the heavenly is much better than earthly kingdoms. Topics often refer to coming out of the physical world and into the spiritual. Usually, a paradox in one passage is explained in another. Being born again of water and the spirit caused Nicodemus concern in John 3, but Romans 6 explains this for us.

The poet Carl Sandburg described the human condition this way. "There is an eagle in me that wants to soar, and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud." That's a paradox. Seemingly contradictory statements that are nonetheless true. As this life causes us to grow old and our bodies no longer function as we want, the truth is that we can soar like eagles, held up by God. *"Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary"* (Isaiah 40:30-31). The contradiction goes away when the understanding that the physical and spiritual realms are opposites in many ways. Here our bodies are subject to the earthly rules, but our spirits are subject to heavenly rules.

The death of Jesus is a difficult paradox to many. He died to remove the yoke of bondage and the power of Satan from us. Paul reminds Christians, *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery"* (Galatians 5:1). But Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"* (Matthew 11:28-30). By placing oneself under the yoke of Christ, that person receives all the benefits of being in God's family. *"Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God"* (Galatians 4:4-7). There is a big difference between the yoke of sin and the yoke of Christ Jesus.

When Jesus humbled Himself to wash the disciple's feet, He set an example of service. He told the disciples, *"For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you"* (John 13:15). He did not give a command to wash feet but to serve each other. To become great in the Kingdom of God, one must become the servant. The servant's reward for obedience in caring for others is a greater position and responsibility. *"Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:43-45).

Jesus taught about the diligent servant, who works faithfully while the master is away, in Matthew 25 and Luke 12. The reward, according to Luke, is to be served by the master. Both Matthew and Luke indicate that the servant who eagerly watches for the master's return will be richly honored and placed in a position of authority. Therefore Luke advises, *"Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them"* (Luke 12:36-37). Because of their service, they

are promoted in authority over the household. We see Jesus raised from the dead, declared be both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and elevated to the throne (Acts 13:30, 33; Hebrews 12:2). We honor Him as savior and King, raised to that position because He served both God and mankind. Jesus served God the Father by obeying and coming to Earth (John 10:17-18). He served mankind by shedding His blood to redeem us from eternal death (Romans 5:8-10).

We see distress all around us. Everyday problems, compounded by a pandemic, give our eyes a picture of gloom and uncertainty. But there is an eye that can see wonderful unseen things. By the "eye of faith," Abraham traveled through unknown lands, searching for the heavenly promise. (Hebrews 11:9-10). It is a paradox that mystifies many, that our faith in God's Word allows us to see the unseeable. And so we focus upon the prize of a home prepared for us in heaven.

Can we say as Paul did, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:14)?