

Lesson 9

A SERVANT

The Disciple's Greatness

"...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave" (Matt. 20:26-27)

Children are often asked what they want to be when they grow up. We have a reason for asking this question. As parents, we want the best for our children. We want them to get the best education they can get and have opportunities to make the most of their lives. However, we are somewhat powerless to help our children until they first decide what they want to do.

What if God asked us as His children, "What do you want to be when you grow up (spiritually)?" How would we answer that question? What would God want us to be? Perhaps an elder or elder's wife? A gospel preacher? A song leader or Bible class teacher? While our minds may naturally go to such important roles within the local church, Jesus taught that the greatest thing we can hope to be is a servant to our brethren.

A Unique Role For A Servant

A servant's primary obligation is to his master. A good servant respects the authority of his master and seeks to be faithful, obedient, and useful to his master.

Disciples of Christ are servants of Christ, submitting to His authority and obeying His will (Luke 6:46). However, Jesus taught that a disciple's role as a servant is more inclusive than that of any other type of servant. Not only are we to serve Christ (our Master), but we are to also serve one another (our fellow servants).

In Matthew 20:20-23, the mother of James and John came before Jesus seeking places of prominence in His kingdom for her sons. After telling them that such was not His to give, the Lord then had to deal with the negative effect their request had upon the rest of the disciples (v. 24). These men were often arguing about which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom, and they resented James and John for taking this action.

... our **Master** was a **servant**.
The greatest thing that we can ever hope to become is a **servant like Jesus**, and the way that we serve Jesus is by **serving one another**.

Jesus took advantage of this opportunity to teach about true greatness in His kingdom. He said that in the kingdoms of men, greatness is shown by the ability to exercise authority over others (v. 25), but in His kingdom, things would be different. Greatness would be demonstrated by a willingness to take on the role of a slave and serve other disciples (vv. 26-28).

Why a Disciple Should Be A Servant

Being a servant is going to challenge the way most people think. Many of us battle our pride, which seeks to elevate self over others. Also, we are conditioned by our world to be self-centered and self-serving. The Lord's call to servitude contradicts everything the world says we should be. So why should we consider taking on the role of a servant?

1. Greatness in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:26-27). The Lord says the servant has the highest ranking position in His kingdom. This is not because the servant is striving to achieve greatness, but because he is putting others before himself. The world may not think much of servants, but the Lord says that no one is greater than the one who serves another.

2. Following Christ's Example (Matt. 20:28). Jesus did not come to this world to be served. As Creator, He has every right to exert His authority over this world and to expect those in the world to serve Him. Instead of demanding these rights, Jesus came to this world as a servant and gave Himself for others.

On the night He was betrayed, in the confines of the upper room, Jesus got up from the table, laid aside His garments, girded Himself with a towel and went around the room washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:3-17). This was a task that was customarily performed by the lowest-ranking house servant. After He washed their feet, Jesus told them that He had given them an example that they should do to one another as He had done to them (v. 15). Jesus was not instituting foot washing as a church ordinance. He was responding to their quest for greatness by showing them how to humble themselves in their service to one another.¹

A disciple strives to be like his master (Luke 6:40). We are like Christ when we are giving ourselves in service to others.

How To Be a Good Servant

It is not enough to just be a servant. In serving Christ, we want to do our very best. What does it take to be a good servant?

1. Attitude. We must begin by looking at our own heart. We cannot do the good work of serving others until we have the right attitude in our heart (Matt. 12:35). I am to serve out of **love** – a love for God and for my fellowman (Matt. 22:36-39). I am to serve with an attitude of **meekness**, showing **kindness** and **gentleness** towards others. I must serve

1 The gospel of Luke indicates that, after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the disciples were once again disputing among themselves as to which one of them would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). Perhaps this is what prompted the Lord to rise from the table and give them this incredible and lasting example of humility and servitude.

with **humility**. The people of the world may arrogantly exert their authority over others, but Jesus wants His disciples to act differently than the people of the world. We are to lower ourselves to the point that we can serve at our brother's feet, looking upon them as objects of our service, not as opportunities to be served.

2. Awareness. A servant's life requires alertness and diligence on our part.

We must be aware of our own **talents** (Rom. 12:6-8). As we have seen in a previous lesson, we are all different. We have unique talents, abilities, and opportunities. We need to know where our talents lie, and make the best use of our opportunities to serve others.

We must be aware of our **task**. Good servants do not need to be reminded that there is a job to be done. They know what their task is and are ready to serve (Titus 2:14; 3:8, 14).

We must also be aware of the **needs of others**. Jesus saw and responded to the needs of others. We must follow His example. A servant does not think of himself. We must see the needs of others and consider them to be important (Phil. 2:3-4).

3. Action. The word "serve" is a verb. Good intentions and kind words do not make us servants (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:18). Serving makes us a servant. As we have opportunity, we are to do good to all, especially to our brethren (Gal. 6:10). Exactly how can we serve our brethren?

There are times when we need to meet their **physical needs**. Jesus said that we serve Him when we feed, house, clothe, and visit brethren who are in need (Matt. 25:35-40). Pure and undefiled religion involves our helping those who need help (James 1:27). We are to share the things that we have with those who are in need (Eph. 4:28).

There are times when we need to meet their **emotional needs**. We need to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). We need to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). We need to comfort the fainthearted and uphold the weak hands that hang down (1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 12:12).

There are times when we need to meet their **spiritual needs**. Babies in Christ need to be established in the faith (1 Pet. 2:2), those who are struggling need to be exhorted (Heb. 3:12-13), those who are unruly need to be warned (1 Thess. 5:14), those who are backsliding need to be restored (Gal. 6:1), and those who are unfaithful need to be rescued (James 5:19-20).

In the kingdom,
greatness
is not found
in those who
demand the most
from others, but
in those who
give the most
of themselves.

4. Availability. Serving others requires our **time**. Unfortunately, in our modern world, time seems to be the one thing that we are unable to give to others. However, the reality is that we make the time to do the things we want to do. Jesus understood the importance of taking the time to serve others. He said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Serving others requires our **personal involvement**. Jesus was found among the people: in their streets, in their homes, in their synagogues and marketplaces. He responded to pleas for help, and took people aside to aid and comfort them. We must respond personally to the needs of our brethren if we are going to claim to be their servant.

Serving others requires a **sacrifice**. Unlike the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan made himself available to a man who was in need (Luke 10:30-37). He sacrificed his safety, his time, his property, the comfort of riding on his animal, and his money to meet this man's needs. There may be times when we will have to make similar sacrifices to meet the needs of others.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the greatest man the world has ever known. He was not a political leader or military commander. He was not the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. He was not a champion athlete, trend-setting celebrity, adored performer, successful lawyer, or life-saving doctor. He was not one of the many things to which this shallow world attributes greatness. He was a humble servant, yet in serving others He gained the name which is above every other name (Phil. 2:5-11).

Jesus calls those who would be His disciples to follow Him. A disciple is like His master (Matt. 10:25; cf. Luke 6:40), and our Master was a servant. The greatest thing we can ever hope to become is a servant like Jesus, and the way that we serve Jesus is by serving one another.

Questions

1. What role does Jesus take when He came into this world (Matt. 20:28; Phil. 2:7)? _____

2. Contrast the standard of greatness in the world with the standard of greatness in the Lord's kingdom (Matt. 20:26-27). _____

3. What is the primary obligation of a servant? _____

4. How does Jesus expand the role of His servants? Who are they to serve? _____

5. Why is it difficult for some people to take on the role of a servant? _____

6. What does Jesus say about the individual who does his good deeds in order to be seen by men (Matt. 6:1-4)? _____

7. What powerful illustration does Jesus use to set an example of humility and service before His disciples (John 13:3-17)? _____
8. When are we most like Christ? _____
9. What kinds of attitudes does an effective servant need to possess? _____

10. What is to characterize the people that Jesus has redeemed and purified (Titus 2:14)? _____

11. What kind of attitude should we have towards the needs of others (Phil. 2:3-4)? _____

12. Why must a disciple's service with include more than just words and good intentions (James 2:15-16)? _____

13. How does Jesus say that disciples serve Him (Matt. 25:35-40)? _____

14. Why is it important that we meet the emotional needs of our brethren? _____

15. How are we to meet the various spiritual needs of our brethren? Provide Scriptures to support your answers. _____

16. List some sacrifices the Good Samaritan made in to help the man who was in need (Luke 10:30-37). _____

17. Why is Jesus given the name which is above every name (Phil. 2:5-11)? _____

