

Feb 20th 2011: Servanthood : Luke 17:7-10

Over the past couple of weeks we have been looking at some of the non-negotiables that Jesus sets before His followers. Actions that He expects those who are His to perform as a matter of course. Things that set them apart as belonging to Him—as His redeemed people.

So we began with Trust, and we recognized that Trust in Him and His power is one thing that God wants to see constantly developing, growing, and evident in every believer.

Then last week we considered **worship**. It was Martin Luther who said:
"The most acceptable service we can do and show unto God, and which alone He desires of us, is that He be praised of us."

A W Tozer wrote: ***"We are saved to worship God. All that Christ has done for us in the past and all that He is doing now leads to this one end."***

He then went on to say that our first concern and delight should always be worship, but that from our worship comes our desire to serve. And it is this concept of us being **servants** of our Lord that is the non-negotiable of following Jesus that we are looking at today.

We who follow Jesus are His servants and as servants our responsibility is to serve Him, and He calls us to do that by being part of His body here on earth. As such our non-negotiable task is to minister to those within and without the fellowship of Jesus, even as Jesus Himself ministered when He walked this earth. To do all things that He calls us to do, small or large, so that His Body the Church will be effective in its portrayal of God's Grace, Love, compassion and mercy.

There's a prayer of ST. Theresa that says:-

"Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which
He walks to do good
Yours are the hands with which
He blesses all the world

Yours are the hands
Yours are the feet
Yours are the eyes
You are His body"

Jesus Himself emphasized servant-hood on the part of His disciples. Look through the many parables he told and you find that a surprising number are about servants. But the thing about servants in the New Testament is that the word most often translated servant is the word "doulos" which is better translated slave or bond servant.

Allan Webb in his book "The heart of Godly Leadership" (Hudson Press 2007 p69) writes:-

"in the Bible there are two different kinds of servants who are mentioned. There are hired servants and there are bondservants. The hired servants are those who receive wages for their service and who enjoy certain privileges and rights and benefits. The bondservants on the other hand are those who receive no wages for their service and who enjoy no privileges or rights or benefits whatsoever.

Bondservants were the absolute property of their master.....Whatever their master said, they did; wherever their master sent, they went.....When the Bible talks about our need to be a servant this is the word that is used.

We are to be bondservants first and foremost to Jesus our heavenly Master and then we are to be bondservants to one another for the way in which we serve Jesus our Master in heaven is by serving one another here upon earth. We show ourselves to be true bondservants of Jesus by the way in which we serve one another."

Note the words I have highlighted. As believers we are not simply to be bondservants of Jesus, but bondservants to one another.

Paul the Apostle understood and practiced this for the sake of His savior. In 1 Corinthians 9:19 he writes:-

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

And then again in 2 Corinthians 4:5:

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

Once again he uses the word *doulos* which is slave or bondservant, and he is writing to a group of Christians that had given him the most trouble—many of whom were proud lazy and immoral, and had said a lot of nasty things about him—yet because of Jesus he is willing to be their bondservant.

The greatest example however, of someone willing to be a bondservant that we find in the New Testament is Jesus Himself. Paul wrote about Him in that wonderful passage in Philippians chapter 2 where he states in v6-7:

***Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
' but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.***

Again the word servant is *doulos*. He took the nature of a slave or bondservant. Paul knew that Jesus had done so for him, and now, for the sake of Jesus, Paul was prepared to take on that same nature, which would have been so alien for this once so proud and arrogant Pharisee, for others.

The clincher for us who also believe in Jesus is of course, that Jesus also took on the nature of a slave for our sake. Are we prepared to do the same for Him. The answer to that is normally yes, but with some conditions.

For instance we are quite prepared to, in a sense, wash the feet of Jesus as His bondservant. To do the things that we feel honoured to do or which give us a nice sense of purpose, fulfillment, achievement, or recognition. But too often the Lord calls us to wash the feet of others. Of those that we feel don't deserve it, or should be doing it themselves, or who upset us, or who take advantage.

Or maybe the conditions we place are not so much about who we serve as about what we do or how often we do something. A choice we make which has more to do with what makes us happy than what the Lord wants of us.

The issue is however, that the word bondservant and making conditions do not go together. A bondservant belongs to the Master and He doesn't make

suggestions but gives orders and His expectation is for us to obey them. To serve Him and to keep on serving Him even when we get weary and tired, and feel overworked and under appreciated.

That's what He was saying in this rather strange parable of the Master and the servants that Geoff read to us from Luke 17:7-10

"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'

Once again the word used is the word bondservant or slave. We may feel for the poor guy:- working all day in the field by himself and then, because he seems to be the only slave the Master has, having to prepare and serve the evening meal before he can eat and drink and have a rest. But that says Jesus is because he is a bondservant. He belongs to the Master and is no doubt pleased that he has a Master who allows him to eat and drink and have a rest at the end of the day.

And we have a Master too. He is our Saviour and friend and He has laid down His life for us, but He is still our Master, and He expects us to give our lives into His service without expecting praise or even thanks for what we do.

Now that may sound a little harsh to you. Not at all what you expect from Jesus. We all like to be appreciated. We like to be noticed and we all probably know someone who has complained bitterly about a Pastor or a church that seemed to take all their work for granted. But the reason Jesus talks like this here is because one day it will all be different. On that day the bondservant will take up their honoured place at the banquet of the Lamb.

In fact in Luke 12;35-37 Jesus tells another parable about His bondservants which completes this parable:

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so

that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them."

To be dressed ready for service is to be busy about the Master's work right now. For when he returns that's when He will show us His thankfulness for all the hard and long hours we have put in for Him here on earth. For on that day he Himself will dress once again as a servant, and serve us.

We are not a very large fellowship, but it is surprising how many little things need to be done week after week for us to be effective in our mission for Jesus. And at times I speak to the Lord and I ask Him why it is that He leads us into so many ways of worshipping and serving Him, all of which need people to make them happen. And I found the answer here. That the Lord has a fellowship full of His bondservants. We are all at His bidding. And He as Lord and Master of each one of us has ways of making us listen and filling the spots that need to be filled. And He has placed us here to be useful, even during those times when we feel stretched to the limit and, maybe, most ineffective.

Ted Engstrom in (p666 750 Engaging Illustrations) The Pursuit of Excellence writes:

I was cleaning out a desk drawer when I found a flashlight I hadn't used in over a year. I flipped the switch but wasn't surprised when it gave no light. I unscrewed it and shook it to get the batteries out, but they wouldn't budge.

Finally, after some effort, they came loose. What a mess! Battery acid had corroded the entire inside of the flashlight. The batteries were new when I'd put them in, and I'd stored them in a safe, warm place. But there was one problem. Those batteries weren't made to be warm and comfortable. They were designed to be turned on—to be used.

It's the same with us. We weren't created to be warm, safe, and comfortable. You and I were made to be "turned on"—to put our love to work, to apply our patience in difficult, trying situations—to let our light shine.

But the best thing is that one day, when this life is over, the Lord Jesus will gather together those who have been faithful in the small things. He will show us all he achieved through this fellowship here and then sit us down to a banquet. And he Himself will serve.