

SERIES: BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE
SERMON: SERVE BEFORE YOU LEAD
2-12-23

OPENER:

Matthew 20:20-28 (NLT) ²⁰ Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favor. ²¹ "What is your request?" he asked.

She replied, "In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honor next to you, one on your right and the other on your left."

²² But Jesus answered by saying to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?"

"Oh yes," they replied, "we are able!"

²³ Jesus told them, "You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen."

²⁴ When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. ²⁵ But Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them.

But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. ²⁸ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

James and John's mother comes to Jesus and asks that her two sons are seated at positions of high honor in heaven next to Jesus. But Jesus' answers her question – *"You do not know what you are asking"*

Then Jesus brought James and John over and his question to them reveals how far they have to go. *"Can you drink the cup?"* In other words, can you fully share in my life and drink to the bottom of the suffering and ridicule and mockery and hatred you will encounter? Can you drink the cup by fully laying down your life?

Notice that, very quickly they say, *"We can."* How quick sometimes we are to promise God or others great deeds!

Jesus tells the disciples, *"You will drink my cup."* He knows that with all their frailty and self-centeredness, their hearts do desire to love him and be with him. He knows they will follow him to the end and will sacrifice all eventually.

The other disciples were indignant: How could James and John make such a request? I wonder if their indignation didn't stem from a secret desire to ask the same. James and John had beat them to it. Think about that!

But, Jesus also makes it clear, *"I cannot promise what you ask."* *All of that is the decision of my Father.*

Positions of greatness are not obtained by who you know, or what family you come from, or your ability to get on someone's good side, or by manipulating people to grant your request. God alone is the only one who grants honor and greatness. He is the one that chooses who is great. And He measures greatness much differently than we do.

How do you measure greatness in people?

>For some, it has to do with the size of one's financial portfolio. >For others, it is their position in the corporate or political world. >And for others, it has to do with how many followers they have on Twitter or Facebook. ...how popular you are, how many people know.

All of these, and many more, are measures of greatness in our culture. But those measures that are meaningful in this world are meaningless in the kingdom of God.

IN THIS PASSAGE, JESUS TURNS THE DEFINITION OF GREATNESS OVER ON ITS HEAD.

THE STANDARD OF GREATNESS IS NOT MEASURED BY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO SERVE YOU, BUT BY HOW MANY YOU YOURSELF SERVE.

ACCORDING TO JESUS, THE ONE WHO WILL BECOME FIRST MUST BECOME LAST - THE SERVANT OF ALL.

According to Jesus, it is not the pastor of the mega-church with a large staff and extensive campus who is great. Rather it is the nursery worker who wipes noses and bottoms. The one who serves, not only the little ones but also their parents, allowing them to be a part of groups and worship.

WE WANT TO BE OUR BEST - BE LEADERS - BE SHAKERS - DO GREAT THINGS FOR GOD.

BUT TO BE GREAT - YOU MUST BECOME THE LEAST.

WHEN GOD LOOKS FOR GREATNESS HE DOESN'T LOOK FOR THOSE WHO ARE AT THE FRONT OF THE LINE - HE LOOKS FOR THOSE AT THE BACK OF THE LINE.

WHEN GOD LOOKS FOR LEADERS, HE DOESN'T LOOK FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS COME OUT ON TOP - HE LOOKS FOR THOSE WHO ARE AT THE BOTTOM - THOSE HOLDING OTHERS UP.

ILLUSTRATION:

When you think of servanthood, do you envision it as an activity performed by relatively low-skilled people at the bottom of the flow chart? Often we assume that if we serve, people will lower their view of us. But this is wrong.

Think for a moment about the person who has served you more than anyone else in your life. Answers might vary, but most people will automatically respond, "My mother." Moms seem to be the greatest example of servanthood as they naturally serve the members of their family.

Now here's another question: Do you have a lower view of your mother because she serves you, or a higher view of her? Most everyone would say a higher view. Why? Serving other people has exactly the opposite effect from what we think it will.

POINT: SERVANTHOOD ADDS VALUE TO PEOPLE

PEOPLE ARE DRAWN TOWARD THOSE WHO SERVE THEM- NOT REPELLED BY THEM.

This is what Jesus did, day in and day out. Maybe that's why people think so highly of him. He served.

LESSON:

John 13: 1-17 (NLT) Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. ² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

⁸ "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

⁹ Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you." ¹¹ For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. ¹⁴ And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, slaves are not

greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

(Explain scripture)

When the disciples booked the upper room for the Passover feast, they forgot to secure the services of a servant to wash feet at the door. It was a custom to do this. Interestingly, as the disciples realized the servant was missing, none of them volunteered for the job. Instead, they argued over who was the greatest. When Jesus saw this, he decided to make an object lesson out of it. So after supper, Jesus stripped down to a garment around his waist. He even looked the part of the servant! Then he took a basin of water and a towel and began washing his disciples' feet. As Jesus interacted with his men, several lessons about service and adding value arose.

FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVANT LEADERS:

1. SERVANT LEADERS ARE MOTIVATED BY LOVE

(vs.1-2) Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. ² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

Jesus' love was undeserved, unending, unconditional and unselfish. It was not the worthiness of the disciples that caused Jesus to serve them. He wasn't expressing gratitude, but grace. Love caused him to serve his disciples.

True unconditional love, loves from the beginning until the end.

Jesus even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot, the man who would betray him and have him killed the next day.

TRUE SERVANTS DON'T JUST SERVE THOSE WHO SERVE THEM.

If your motivation for serving others is to get them to like you or to be popular, then you will not serve others well, and you will lead from a compromised position because you won't be able to take risks and lead for the good of all.

If your motivation in serving others is selfishness to get them to do things for you. Then you will take advantage of others and use them, bulldoze over them for your own personal gain.

2. SERVANT LEADERS POSSESS A SECURITY

(Vs. 3). Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.

Jesus knew who he was, and he was secure enough to get down on the floor and wash his disciples' feet. He didn't have to prove anything. In fact, he had nothing to prove, nothing to lose and nothing to hide. Jesus' security enabled him to humble himself and take a lower position.

**THE INSECURE ARE INTO TITLES.
THE SECURE ARE INTO TOWELS.**

INSECURITY HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE.

SERVANT LEADERS POSSES A SECURITY IN CHRIST SO THEY CAN TAKE THE POSITION OF A SERVANT.

3. SERVANT LEADERS INITIATE SERVANTHOOD

(Vs 4-5) So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

Jesus didn't wait for someone to clarify protocol. He saw a need and met it. No one else had volunteered for the foot-washing job that night—so Jesus stepped in and did it.. He started something that he hoped would be passed down from those twelve disciples to others.

Foot washing will never be in vogue. It will be done by leaders who are willing to pioneer an act of humility and sacrifice.

4. SERVANT LEADERS SUBMIT TO SERVANTHOOD BEFORE THEY SERVE

⁶ When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."

⁸ "No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."

⁹ Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"

¹⁰ Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you."

5. SERVANT LEADERS TEACH SERVANTHOOD BY EXAMPLE

(Vs. 12-15) After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? ¹³ You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. ¹⁴ And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.

Afterward, Jesus discussed the meaning of his foot washing. He reminded them that he had just washed their feet, so no position should prevent them from doing it for someone else. Jesus let them know that if the Master washed their feet, they ought to imitate him. His model was to be reproduced.

ILLUSTRATION:

The fitness classes at the gym were packed that Saturday. A quick glance around the room registered everyone from senior citizens to teenagers to the fittest athlete. The instructor began moving to the music and within minutes the group was united, even with the varying levels of ages and ability.

At one point, the instructor stopped moving and began to shout out the instructions. While the class clearly heard the directions, one by one they stopped moving. While they had the capacity to accomplish the task alone, they were more confident when the instructor worked alongside them. Simply saying what to do next wasn't enough. They were lost without a leader doing the same work.

LEADERSHIP ISN'T SIMPLY SHOUTING ORDERS AND DEMANDING OBEDIENCE.

LEADERSHIP LEADS BY DOING THE SAME WORK.

**TRUE LEADERSHIP SERVES OTHERS BY SHOWING OTHERS WHAT TO DO -
NOT JUST TELLING THEM.**

SERVANT LEADERS LIVE A BLESSED LIFE

(16-17) ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

Jesus reminded them they were blessed if they obeyed him in this lifestyle. The greatest blessing follows those who step out by faith and do the opposite of what the world is doing. God blesses those who "go countercultural" and serve people with no thought of getting something in return from them. The return comes in the form of God's blessing.

Applying An Attitude of A Servant:

- **Put others ahead of your agenda.**
- **Develop the confidence and security to take risks.**
- **Look for a need and take the initiative without being asked.**
- **Perform small acts of servitude anonymously.**
- **Learn to walk slowly through the crowd.**
- **Begin your day reflecting on the love you have for others in your life.**