

Ministry Minded

In the Scripture we just read, Jesus gives us insight into the true message of Christmas. In **verse 45**, He says, *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" One of the blessings of Christmas is that we are reminded of the most essential elements of our Christian faith. One of those lessons is a lesson in true greatness. The only greatness that matters is greatness in God's eyes. What if true greatness in God's eyes is radically different than true greatness in the world's eyes? Of course, there is really no "what if" about it. We know that it is. When I read the story of the first Christmas in the gospel of Luke, it's humorously ironic how the text mentions powerful people like Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, the governor of Syria, people who would have been considered great in their own day and yet the story reveals that the true greatness was to be found in a little known couple named Joseph and Mary and the baby she carried and birthed in Bethlehem. They were the most powerful people on the chessboard of world history in that critical moment that the world didn't even recognize.

I so long for us all to break free from the endless deceits of this misguided world so we can live in light of what matters most to God. This story from the life of Jesus can help us with that. In this short story, the lesson Jesus clearly teaches mirrors the message that he lived out from his birth in Bethlehem to his sacrifice on Calvary. The setting for the story in **Mark 10** is toward the end of Jesus' life. They were on their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus would be killed. Jesus had just given the most definite and detailed description of what was going to happen to Him. He told them that He was going to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, spit on, flogged, and crucified! Yet John and James, two of his closest friends and disciples, came to him and asked to be given places of prominence when he came to power. James and John were thinking about themselves and what they wanted. What they wanted was to have places of prominence.

In his response to them, Jesus is telling all of us that...

I. TO TRULY LIVE AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS, WE MUST HAVE A RADICAL CHANGE OF PERSPECTIVE.

In the beginning, when James and John are asking for positions of prominence, Jesus said, *"You don't know what you're asking,"* He asked *them* if they were able to go through the things He was going to have to experience... to drink the cup the had to drink and to be baptized with the baptism with which he was going to be baptized. He was asking them to ask a different question. James and John didn't know their own weaknesses. They were sure they could do whatever they had to do if it got them what they wanted. When the other disciples heard about this, they were angry. Jesus called them all together and used it as an opportunity to teach an important lesson.

Jesus uses this occasion to teach us all that

A. True greatness is found in the service that we offer others.

He said what we need to understand is this, **verses 43-44**. *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all.* It is not typical or common to think of greatness in terms of service. But Jesus confronts the shallowness of selfishness by elevating service to the essence of true greatness in the kingdom of God.

One of the lessons we learn from this story is that ...

B. Even good Christians, surrounded by good influences, can fall completely out of step with the Christ they claim to follow.

James and John were outstanding disciples. Together with Peter, they were Jesus' inner circle, those closest to him. For three years, they watched his example and listened to his teachings. But on this occasion, they were blind to what was wrong with their own attitude. They thought they were committed to following Christ, but they were completely out of step with Christ! They had very little insight into their own hearts. We've got to learn to ask ourselves how often we are blind to ways in which we are out of step with Christ. Take inventory! Are we

Christ-like in our relationships and in our view of ministry or service for others? It was natural for James and John to want to have the places of prominence. What they needed was a very different mindset.

II. A DISCIPLE OF JESUS HAS A MINISTRY MINDSET.

He states it clearly in **verse 43**: *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.* In the Bible, the words for serving, to serve, or service are the same as the words Ministering, to minister, and ministry.

So this morning, as we continue looking at the seven facets of discipleship, we come to the fifth facet, which begins the outward look. It is this: a disciple of Jesus is ministry-minded.

A. We have to be intentional about a mindset for ministry because there is a system at work in the world around us.

Jesus is not naïve about the way things work in what some people like to call “*the real world.*” Look at **verse 42**. He says, “*you know*” these things. Those who have power and privileges usually use their position to their own advantage. At the beginning of **verse 43**, Jesus introduces the complete contrast that is to be true of us when having described the way the world works. He says; Not so with you... When you walk in the steps of Jesus Christ, following Him, your walk is completely different. Jesus says; *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.* I think we should all recognize that what Christ is telling us here is so different than the way we all are by nature that it takes a very definite step of faith and a willingness to humble ourselves and trust God if we are going to follow Christ and be ministry-minded.

B. True discipleship is about following Christ, so of course, it is completely counter to the mindset of consumerism.

One of the most common critiques of contemporary Western culture is that we have become consumeristic. Consumerism - the idea that I approach everything as a consumer looking to be served more than to

serve others. When I'm running low on gas, I usually have one thing on my mind. I want to fill the tank and be on my way. I don't really plan on socializing or on servicing someone else's car. If someone is in distress, I would certainly help out, but I don't expect that most of the time or look for it. Well, that may be expected at the gas station, but how many people think of the church sort of like a gas station - a place you go to fill your spiritual gas tank when you're running low. You pull in to get a sermon and some worship, and it keeps you going for the week. Of course, no one comes out and says that's their image of the church, but it's the way some people treat the church. Our culture teaches us to assume the natural thing is to want service coming our way. We're not often encouraged, and sometimes, because of that, not all that interested in service or ministry that goes outward to others.

C. To be ministry-minded is to be thinking not primarily about what I want to receive but rather what I want to give.

Ministry-mindedness is not frantic busyness. It's not neglecting healthy rhythms of work and rest. It is not the inability to say "no" when asked to do something you cannot manage. It is an attitude of willingness to serve and openness to God. It is an attitude of helpfulness that asks *What can I do? How can I help? Where am I needed? What can I offer or give for the cause of Christ and the church?*

This theme which is so clearly taught by Jesus and exemplified in his life, is repeatedly emphasized and expanded in the rest of the Bible. Scripture teaches four things related to each of us having a ministry...

1st. Everyone who belongs to Jesus has some meaningful ministry ability that has been given by God. In **1 Peter 4:10**, he says, *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.* The word translated "varied" is the word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe Joseph's coat of many colors. It was a word used to describe the many colors of a richly embroidered garment.

Other Scriptures like **1 Corinthians 12** and **Romans 12** make the point that everyone is gifted in different ways. The church is called the

body of Christ in Scripture. We are the body of Christ, indwelt by his Spirit. Part of the idea of the body of Christ is that just as the human body has different parts and members that serve different functions, the individual members of the body of Christ serve different roles that complement each other. Your brain, as wonderful as it is, cannot tie a knot in your shoelace. You need fingers for that. So everyone is gifted, and everyone is needed in the body of Christ.

Peter divides these ministry gifts into two categories in **1 Peter 4:10-11**. He says, *whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* There are various places in the Bible where lists of gifts for ministry are found. There is no indication that all the possible gifts that could be given are itemized in the Bible. The most helpful way to think of it could be as simple as to recognize that we all have something we can contribute to the cause of Christ and the health of his church.

2nd. Along with our ministry abilities come responsibilities.

Verse 10 calls us to be good stewards of God's varied grace. A steward is someone entrusted with something they are to use for the sake of the owner or the master. In Christ, God has given you grace, and he has given you gifts. He has made us stewards of these gifts. Do you know what is required? **1 Corinthians 4:2** says *it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*. The grace of God isn't just for consumption. It is given for transformation into Christ-likeness and for use in Christ's causes.

3rd. Christ works in and through all of his people to build up his body in the church. Ephesians 4:15-16 *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

It is interesting that the Bible never recognizes a problem in figuring out your gifts. It assumes that if you commit to the community and begin to serve the needs of the community, the gifts within you *will* be manifest in the context of your commitment to serve. In the Scriptures, discovering your gift is not the problem. The issue is our willingness to use our gifts to serve the Lord by serving others. The question for a disciple is, *are you ministry-minded*. Do you look for ways to use what you have to offer to build the body up in love.

4th . The work we do to serve the Lord in ministry is never in vain
1 Corinthians 15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

There are opportunities for ministry all around us. There are people in this church every Sunday who are faithful to come early and stay late. There are people who work with children, people who faithfully show up and say, *“you can depend on me... I'll take care of this ministry, this job. I'll help wherever you need help.”* Others serve the mission of the church outside the facilities of the church or even the formal programs of the church, hosting and leading small groups, working with the Rose Marie Bryan Children's Center, Prison Ministry, Resources for Women, and other ministries also. There are many needs and places to serve. The main thing is to be open, willing to serve, and ministry-minded. Be faithful in the little things. Faithfulness in the little things is a big thing and in all these things you can know your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

III. AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS, WE TAKE ON OUR MINISTRIES FOR HIM BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR US.

Mark 10:45 gives the reason for our service *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* With the powers Jesus had, He could have arranged life to suit Himself, but he used gave Himself.

A. He gave himself as a ransom for many.

The word “*ransom*” is the Greek word for the payment made to buy the freedom of a slave or a prisoner. The little word “*for*” in Greek is the word *anti*, which means “*in the place of*.” When someone was a slave or a prisoner, you would have to pay a ransom that would be given in place of the prisoner, who would then be set free. When Christ died on the cross, He was paying the price that was necessary for us to be free. The prophet Isaiah wrote hundreds of years before Christ. In **Isaiah 53:6**, He said: *We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Scriptures tell us there is a spiritual world that interpenetrates our world. There is a real spiritual world ruled by a perfect God who has given us perfect laws of life that we have repeatedly broken. There is a fabric to that spiritual world that is woven of perfect love, justice, truth, and goodness. When we tear that fabric, it *must* be mended. When God determined to redeem fallen humanity, it took an incredible plan that unfolded over several millennia leading to the birth of Jesus as the promised Savior, his perfect life, his crucifixion to pay for our sins, and his resurrection from the dead.

B. He did *for us* and *in our place*, what we could not do.

This is why the Bible tells you that you do not and cannot earn your salvation by doing good works. You receive salvation by turning to Christ as Lord and trusting Him as our Savior. Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves. On the cross, Jesus said: “It is finished .” There is nothing you can add to that. You can not pay for your sins or balance the scales of justice by your efforts. But you can repent and believe in Jesus. You can acknowledge him as Lord and trust in him as your Savior. If you have received his gift of salvation, *then*, because you have, He calls you to follow his example and seek not to be served but to serve others in Jesus’ name.

The story of Jesus inspires us and empowers us to live a whole new way of life. He took this path of humility and sacrifice to redeem us. If you could speak the universe into existence, would you humble yourself to sleep on straw and be clothed in a diaper? If you knew that

few would care that you came and suffered and died for them, would you exchange the worship of angels for the abuse of arrogant killers? Would you suffer the agony of bearing human sinfulness so that you could redeem a people for yourself? The gospel, the story of the love of God in Christ, shows us a radical reversal of the world's way of thinking that calls us also to be ministry-minded.

CONCLUSION

We look at what he's done and who he is, and we trust him, and we love him, and we want to do what we can do for him.

There's an old legend about Jesus. Understand it is not in the Bible. It is only a legend. It says Jesus was walking one day with His disciples and asked each one to pick up a stone to carry for Him. They all picked up a stone. Peter, thinking he was smart picked up a pretty small one; John, a bigger one. Jesus led them to the top of a mountain, and then He commanded the stones to be made into bread. The disciples were by this time hungry, and so they were given permission to eat the bread in their hands. Of course, Peter didn't have very much. John shared some of the bread made from the stone he had carried with him. On the following day, Jesus took the same disciples for a walk and asked them, again, to pick up a stone to carry for Him. This time Peter picked up a really big heavy stone. It was heavy, but he thought, "It'll be worth it." On this day, Jesus took them to the river. As they stood on the bank wondering what was next, he said, "Throw your stones into the river," which they all did. Peter looked at Him, expectantly waiting for the miracle that would happen this time.

Nothing happened. They waited. They watched. Nothing happened. Jesus, with quiet compassion, looked at these disciples whom He loved, especially Peter, and He asked, "*For whom did you carry the stone today?*" For whom does a disciple of Jesus carry the weight of service and ministry? Is it for self, for acclaim, to accomplish some personal dream, or to put God in our debt? No. We choose to be

ministry-minded for Christ's sake. He gave himself for us, giving us the greatest of all gifts already, and so we gladly follow Him!

Amen

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Almighty God, You have powerfully revealed your love in Jesus, whose body was broken and whose blood was shed for our salvation. I admit my need for your saving grace. I turn to Christ who gave himself as a ransom for me. I trust in him for my redemption. I believe he died on the cross to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation. Grant me the new and eternal life promised to all who come to him in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord God, Unite my heart to love and follow Christ so as to seek and find my life in him! Help me to break free from the pull of selfishness and laziness to joyfully and fully give myself to ministry and service. Give me eyes to see the true greatness of Christian service. May I be ministry minded so as to faithfully fulfill my stewardship of grace and giftedness. Sustain me by your Holy Spirit. Guide me with your inspired word. Transform me more and more into the likeness of Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen.