

LESSON 13: JESUS: SERVANT LEADER

MARCH 29, 2020

Background Scripture: Matthew 20; John 13

Lesson Passage: Matthew 20:20-28; John 13:12-17 (ESV)

Introduction: 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 on them from what we think it will. People are drawn toward those who serve them sacrificially, not repelled by them. Service adds value to people. Servanthood is not about position or skill. It’s about attitude. Leaders seek ways they can add value to others, and the primary way they do it is by serving them.

Scripture Reference: Matthew 20:20-28 (ESV)

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. 21 And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” 22 Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.” 23 He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” 24 And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 26 It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, 28 even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Scripture Reference: John 13:12-17 (ESV)

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Memory Verse: *14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you* (John 14:14, 15) ESV

Topic Explored: “Jesus: Servant Leader” In John 13, the Savior of the world exhibited that He was also the greatest Servant of all time. The story is familiar to many. 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 disciples, several lessons about service and adding value arose.

Lesson Focus: Matthew 20:20-28

Verses 20- 21 ~ Today we come to a text that shows once again that Man is innately self-centered and desires to gain for himself whatever he can. Modern man is no different than ancient man. The lesson Jesus teaches His disciples is as relevant today as it was on the day this story took place. The first thing we note in our text is a mother's request. The mother of James and John comes to Jesus. From the parallel account in Mark we find that the first request was that Jesus would do for them whatever they asked of Him. Jesus prompted them to be more specific and that is when this specific request comes, "*Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.*" This is a very bold request to make. To sit on the right and the left hand is to be made the two highest ranks in the kingdom possible. The one of the right being "second" in command and the one the left "third" in command. She is asking that Jesus make her two sons the two highest ranking officials in the kingdom under Jesus. Notice as well how Salome approaches Jesus. She comes "kneeling, and made a request of Him." Salome comes to Jesus seeking to gain for her sons, and really for herself as well. What mother does not want her children to rise to important positions, to be "successful." Parents take great pride in how their children turn out, especially if they do achieve important positions.

Verse 22-23 ~ Jesus' answer to her request is not really addressed to Salome, but to James and John instead. We do not know whose idea it was to ask Jesus for these high positions, but it is clear that James and John are not innocent bystanders. The request of their mother is their desire as well. Jesus' first response seeks to bring them back to reality. "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" He questions them as to whether they realized the high price that would have to be paid to be counted worthy of the position they were seeking. They will have to be able to "drink the cup" that Jesus was about to drink.

You would think that their minds would be on a lot of things other than what they would get in the kingdom. If they could not find a way to be an encouragement to Jesus, at least they should have been asking the hows and whys He would have to suffer. James and John wanted to know what was in it for them, and they used their mother and their kinsman relationship with Jesus as a means to get what they wanted. James and John claimed that they were able to drink the same cup that Jesus was about to drink. Jesus tells them that they would indeed drink from it. James and John did drink the cup of Christ's suffering. Are you ready and willing to do so as well? Jesus also tells them that "*to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.*"

James, John and their mother desired to gain the prominent positions from Jesus. It was a wrong thing to seek that for several reasons, among them the inappropriateness of asking for this right after Jesus had told them He was going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. They had not considered the price that would have to be paid. It was not Jesus' place to appoint those positions, and most of all, it was wrong because it demonstrated that they and the other disciples were still largely infected with the world's values.

Verse 24 ~ tells us that when the other ten disciples heard what James, John and their mother had done, they became indignant. Their indignation was not from a sense of concern for what Jesus would be facing nor from the impropriety of James and John's request. As demonstrated by their continued bickering, which continued even to the night of the Last Supper. They were indignant that James and John were trying to gain a higher position over them through their kinship to Jesus. All of them were still infected with the world's values, and the world values positions of prominence and power. The disciples wanted to be great in God's kingdom, but they thought of it in terms of worldly standards. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them how to be truly great.

Verse 25 ~ We are not to be like the world including the manner in which our rulers and great men function. The rulers of the gentiles would lord it over their subjects. "*Lord it over*" is a strong term that has the idea of ruling down on the people, and in that day this was easily understood since most every government of the day was a form of dictatorship, most of them tyrannical in nature. Many of us have worked under such kind of people. Most of us have also had to deal at some time with some government bureaucrat who long ago forgot they were there to serve the people, and instead thinks they are there to command and issue edicts to the people.

Verse 26 ~ While it may be common practice for those that do not know the Lord to use their power in a tyrannical manner to push around those under them, Jesus tells us that it is not to be that way among believers. It is a great tragedy in the church when a person comes to power, whether that is by position or by a charismatic personality, and they view themselves as superior and they use people for their own advantage. Jesus tells us that the path to greatness within His kingdom is different. Greatness in the kingdom comes from being a servant and a slave. Leaders in the church are to be slaves of Christ and servants of His people. The term here translated servant is the term deacon. A deacon was a person who did menial labor such as cleaning up and waiting on tables. If you want to be great, you have to become a humble, selfless servant. And a true servant will sacrifice for the sake of others in the Name of Christ. If you want to be first, then you have to go another step and become a *doulos* (slave). The greatest in the kingdom is the one who is a slave; the one who is sold out completely to Christ and His kingdom. The slave is unconcerned for his own life, his own glory, or his own power. His only concern is for his master. While many claim that Jesus is their Lord, only a few are His slaves.

Verse 28 ~ Jesus Himself is the example of what it means to be great in the kingdom, of what it means to be a servant and a slave. Jesus did not come to exercise His power over man to make man serve Him, He came to serve man and pay the ransom price to redeem man. Jesus did not die on the cross so that you could live in happy circumstances, He died so that your bondage to sin could be broken, that you could be reconciled to God and escape His condemnation, and that you could now have an eternal relationship with Him. If that is the example set by our master, then what should be the mark of our lives.

Lesson Focus: John 13:12-17

Verses 1-2 ~ Are we motivated by love to serve others? Jesus' love was undeserved, unending, unconditional and unselfish. He wasn't expressing gratitude, but grace. Love made Him serve His disciples. Think about it: Jesus even washed the feet of Judas Iscariot, the man who would betray Him and have Him killed the next day.

Verses 4-5 ~ 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 made an object lesson out of the event. He started something that He hoped would be passed down from those twelve disciples to others (John 13:12-15).

Verses 6-9 ~ A servant's heart exposes pride in others. Peter had a hard time letting Jesus serve him. He still possessed a worldly mindset that assumed that someone of Jesus' caliber should never stoop to wash feet. Sometimes leaders must learn to let others serve them. Because they become so used to serving others, it is difficult for them to relax and receive. In this instance, Jesus was asking Simon Peter to sit and allow the Master to serve him. Peter moved from one extreme to the other. If Jesus was going to wash him, he didn't want to miss anything he might do. He wanted Jesus to wash his entire body. Simon Peter exhibits a great attitude here. If Jesus was giving away, he wanted to receive all that Jesus had to give; he didn't want anything to stand between him and his Lord.

Verses 12, 17 ~ Afterward, Jesus discussed the meaning of His foot washing. He reminded them that the Master and Lord 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. In fact, His example was much more powerful than a lecture about the principles of service. Actions speak more loudly than words. 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.

Reflection:

1. **From the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, what do we learn about servant leadership in the most general sense?**

Complete:

1. A voluntary servant of Christ is _____ centered in all aspects.
2. A voluntary servant of Christ is _____ to _____ the needs of others before their own.
3. A voluntary servant of Christ is _____ to _____ with power and love.

Making it personal:

- When leaders serve, they add value to the people who receive their service. This value might be as simple as feeling worthwhile or special. It could be that the value is a resource we put in people's hands or a word of encouragement we speak to them. Whatever it is, people always receive something and feel better about themselves because of their leader.
- A good habit for a leader is try to add value to everyone he or she meets; try to add something to their lives rather than take away. Seek to replenish and resource them to live the higher life God has called them to. This is what Jesus did, day in and day out. Maybe that's why people think so highly of Him. He served.
- To be a Christian means to follow Christ, and be a person who is being conformed into His image (Romans 8:29). Is humility and servant-hood characterize your life? Is your concern what people do for you or what you do for them? How much are you willing to sacrifice in

the service of your master? Is Jesus really your lord or just a commodity that you are seeking to use to gain what you want?

Closing Prayer: *“Father, we pray that we can surrender our selfishness and become more like Jesus; humbly submitted to you in every way. We acknowledge that we can’t do this on our own. It’s only through the power of Holy Spirit. Saturate our lives that we emulate Him each day of our lives, in every way. In His Name we pray, Amen!”*