

DO YOU WANT TO BE MY SERVANT?

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ October 16, 2016



³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." ³⁶ "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. ³⁷ They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." ³⁸ "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" ³⁹ "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right or left is not for

me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." ⁴¹ When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. ⁴² Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ 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." (Mark 10:35-45)

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

Something that I took for granted growing up in Africa, was the presence of servants or housekeepers. For many people here in the United States, the only exposure they have to servants of any sort is in books or television series like Downton Abby. But in Africa, this was a way of life. It was very common, and a little expected to have a housekeeper to help inside the house, a gardener to help outside, a nanny to help with the kids. Maybe you didn't have all of these, but many expatriate families had at least some servant help.

In Malawi, this provided a win-win of sorts, my parents were able to get help around the house, and many times, being "the help" was a good paying job for many of the Malawians, with Malawi being one of the poorest countries in the world. Even though you may not have had a servant growing up in your home, no doubt you've thought about it – "Oh how great it would be to have someone to cook supper," "How great it would be to have a nanny to watch the kids." If money were no object, having a paid servant would probably be a reality in your household. I know it would be in mine.

Chances are, we probably don't think about a servant the other way around. As opposed to having a servant, how many of us have considered personally being a servant? Now, I know that many jobs are considered "service" jobs – restaurants, salesmen, etc, but it isn't quite the same as calling yourself a servant. In many of those other jobs, you offer a service to other people, but a servant offers themselves to other people. For many, service is a means to an end, but a servant is the end goal. It's not the goal of many to be a servant.

But that's exactly what Jesus called for in our gospel for this morning. He said, **"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."** Jesus didn't just say, to be great you must serve, but to be great, you must be a servant. Is that something we are ready hear? Is that something you are ready to do? DO YOU WANT TO BE MY SERVANT?

1. A backwards question

2. For a backwards world

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We once again join Jesus and his band of disciples. Two of them, James and John, a set of brothers, approached Jesus alone. They ask him a question starting, **"We want you to do for us whatever we ask."** "Fine, go ahead," says Jesus. **"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."** Talk about a bold question.

It's easy for us to say, how brash it was to go up and ask Jesus a question like that. But did you notice how Jesus responded? He didn't respond by saying, "Hold your horses, settle down." He didn't condemn them for their ambition to sit at his right and left. But rather he redirected their ambition. **"You don't know what you are asking,"** Jesus said, **"Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"** Jesus wanted James and John to know what they were asking. You want to be important parts of my plan, do you know what that means? It means drinking my cup. Oftentimes in the Bible, "drinking my cup" is referring to particular hardship that is awaiting. You might remember Jesus talking to God the Father in Gethsemane and saying, "Father, take this cup from me." In other words, "take this suffering from me." There is a similar meaning in how Jesus uses baptism as well.

Listening to the promptings of their hearts, James and John imagine that they are ready to take up the mantle that Jesus will leave them with. And Jesus responds with, **"You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right and my left is not for me to grant."** In short, Jesus was predicting the suffering and persecution that James and John would go through in their life, all for preaching the gospel. John would drink the cup of suffering and be exiled on the island of Patmos, while James went through the baptism of death at the hands of King Herod. So the ambition of James and John was good, Jesus just would need to direct it to serve his purpose.

News travelled fast in the small band of disciples, and before long, the other 10 disciples heard about what James and John had asked. They were indignant, they were upset, they were angry. But were they angry for the right reasons? Or were they simply angry because they didn't think to ask Jesus that, or they thought they were the ones who deserved such a position of authority in God's kingdom? This is when Jesus took yet another opportunity to share with his disciples a little bit about what the kingdom of heaven is like. He took this opportunity to share with them where true greatness can be found.

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you." The picture Jesus is describing is very similar to how the world operates today – people in positions of power and authority tend to use that

power and authority to show others who's the best. "But **not so with you**," Jesus said. Once again, Jesus offers the exact opposite advice. He not only offers it, but he insists upon it. "**Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.**"

DO YOU WANT TO BE MY SERVANT? It seems like such a backwards question, but isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying to his disciples? "**Whoever wants to be great...must be your servant.**" So I ask it again, DO YOU WANT TO BE MY SERVANT? This is such a backwards question, and why do we have such a problem with it? If I were to rephrase the question and say, do you want to be Jesus' servant? I think it would be easier for us to say, "yea, sure." But why is it so hard to become one another's servants?

If we remember, the idea of a servant is placing yourself at someone's service. It's easy to do this for people who are above us – like Jesus. But it's not so easy to do with people who are about the same level as us. It's difficult because we have that little voice inside of us that thinks we should be on the receiving end of the service, that people should be lining up to serve me, and not the other way around. It's difficult, because let's face it, being self-less is much harder than being selfish.

It's much easier to act in a way that we think is right, which may or may not line up with the way God sees things. Take for example the first lesson we heard this morning. A king named Uzziah became so proud, became so convinced that his way was the right way, that he prepared to burn incense in the Temple of God, something God made very clear was only right for the priests to do. At this time, God punished Uzziah directly and swiftly for his ungodly attitude, for his ungodly ambition, by cursing him with the skin disease of leprosy.

Now God may or may not directly and swiftly punish you for a particular ambition, so that isn't a measuring stick for whether we're pursuing God's will. Instead, the measuring stick is God's Word. The will of God is summarized in the 10 commandments, which is a reason why we teach this to our confirmation students. It's a reason we teach it to those who wish to become members of Grace. It becomes very clear, very quickly that the source of our breaking each and every one of these commandments is our own selfish ambition – when we make God's Word serve our will, instead of the other way around. Our selfish ambition and God's will are at odds with one another. Which makes it seem like God's will is backwards and ancient in our modern society.

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But is it God's will that is backwards, or is it the world that is backwards? For a number of years in human history, people believed that the sun revolved around the earth, they believed that the earth was the center of the universe. When in fact now we know that it is not the sun which revolves around the earth, but rather the earth that rotates around the sun. Could the same be true of God and his Word. That instead of God's Word revolving around us and making us happy, that our lives should be revolving around God's Word?

Jesus made mention of how the rulers of the Gentiles, or the rulers not governed by God's Word act. They "**lord it over**" and "**exercise authority**" over others. This was true in Jesus' day, and it is still generally true today. Yet, where has all this exercising of authority gotten the human race? People still rebel against authority, people still become jealous, people still are looking for ways to be

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selfish. In short, the world's way of thinking doesn't solve the problem of attitude. And so God's backwards statement, is for a backwards world.

“Whoever wants to be the greatest among you must be your servant.” And God demonstrated this backwards statement with his Son, Jesus. Because no matter what the world would try, no matter what we would try, even if we became a servant to all, nothing would allow us to escape from our just punishment in hell. And so Jesus became our servant. **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”**

As we take a look at Jesus' life, we see Jesus not only serving others, but becoming their servant, putting everyone else's needs before his own. He did this not only in letting the children come to him, healing the sick, comforting the hurting, but he did it most of all with his own sacrifice. Imagine for a moment our day before God's judgment seat in his holy courtroom. The devil, the accuser, lays out every one of the reasons God should not let you into heaven, but rather each of those sins is a reason to send you to hell. God is about to pound down the gavel guilty, case closed. But just before he does, Jesus says, “Wait a minute!” “Let me take his place, let him take my place.”

That is what it means when the last verse of our gospel says, **“Give his life as a ransom for many.”** This happened, whether you believe it or not. But it isn't just that Jesus took the punishment we deserved, but he gave us what he earned – heaven. There is no catch, if you believe that, you are going to heaven. You're not only going to heaven, but heaven is already your possession. This is such a backwards way of thinking, but is it because it's a backwards statement, or is it that our world is backwards?

It is this backwards statement that encourages us in not only serving others, but being a servant to others. Now there's plenty of people who look for greatness *through* service, they see service as a means to an end. But a Christian is to look for greatness *in* service – service is the end goal, not a means to an end. Our service will not look to try and get something out of it for ourselves, but to serve for service's sake.

This is precisely what the Apostle Paul demonstrated in our second lesson for this morning. He became all things to all people, so that he might have an opportunity to share with them the life giving message of Jesus' death and resurrection. DO YOU WANT TO BE MY SERVANT? It may seem like such a backwards question, but a Christian will answer “yes.” Not only to serve Christ, but to serve those around us. May God's Word encourage you and bless you in your service to others. Amen.