

## **The Commands of Christ**

### **Sermon # 28**

#### **“Be A Servant”**

##### **Matthew 20:20-28**

*“Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. (21) And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.” (22) But Jesus answered and said, “You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They said to Him, “We are able.”*

*(23) So He said to them, “You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.” (24) And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. (25) But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. (26) Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— (28) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

There are two commands (Imperatives) found in this passage and they are found in verses twenty six and twenty-seven. Where it says, “... *but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.*” The Imperatives is found in the word (εἶπε) translated “let him be” – your servant (v. 26), your slave (v.27).

First, A True Servant Must Be Careful Of Their Motives. (v. 20)

#### *1. Are You Looking For Special Treatment?*

We need to consider for just a moment, Who Is the mother of James and John? Other Scripture tell us that her name was Solome (Mark 15:40, 16:1) and there is some suggestion that she was the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, which would have made her Jesus’ Aunt. So Solome came to Jesus seeking preferential treatment on the basis of her relationship to Jesus.

#### *2. Is Our Worship Genuine?*

In the King James Version verse twenty reads, “*Then came to him the mother of Zebedees children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.*” Though

the text says that she came worshipping Jesus that does not seem to be the only thing on her mind for it says “worshipping AND...” This brings up an interesting point, do we with our worship ever try to manipulate God. If so we need to understand something, WORSHIP DOES MOVE GOD, BUT IT DOES NOT MANIPULATE GOD! I think there is a prime example of attempting to manipulate God in the life of Jacob as revealed in Genesis 28:20-21. Here we read, *“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on. (21) so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.’”* Jacob made a promise to God with stipulations. I want you to underline two words in this verse, the word “if” and the word “then”. Jacob said, “IF you will be with me and keep me in this way (support me in my plans and agenda) and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on (meet all my needs and desire) so that I come again to my Father’s house in peace (get me where I want to go) THEN the will recognize you as my God!” That is an astounding bit of attempted manipulation.

Verse twenty-four tells us of the reaction of the disciples. *“And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers.”* This verse says that the disciples were “displeased” or as some verses have it “indignant.” The reaction of the disciples reminds me of a story of a newlywed couple who were given a homemade cherry pie by another couple in their church. The husband couldn’t wait to come and get a piece of this pie. But his wife had decided to take the pie with her to work. She shared with her co-workers and every piece was gone. When the husband came home and found out what his wife had done, he said, “I’ll have you know what you did was greedy, selfish, rude and inconsiderate. But do you know what really makes me mad,” he added? “What” she bounced back. He said, “That I did not think of it first.” In the same fashion the other disciples were angry because they believed that James and John were using a special relationship with Jesus to get special treatment and they were not going to give up the top spots without a fight. They were not appalled by James and John’s lack of understanding of true servant hood, they were mad that these two had gotten to Jesus first.

A True Servant Must Be Careful Of Their Motives And...

*Second, A True Servant Discovers Real Greatness Is Found In Serving Christ (vv. 25-27)*

What does Jesus do now, verse twenty-five says that Jesus called them together. Before things go out of hand, he called them together and began to teach them the difference between the world’s standard of greatness and God’s standard of greatness. *“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. (26) Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave.’”*

Jesus pointed out that according to the world greatness is exercising authority. It means being in power. It means having power answerable to you. To the world, greatness is an office with a view. It means having a team of subordinates who answer your every whim. It means

dozens of people who do what you say, cling to your every decision, and inwardly wish to be where you are. It means having the biggest house and the sportiest car and the smartest kids in the best schools and every advantage that life has to offer. The world says that greatness means doing whatever you have to do, to whomever you have to do it to, in order to claw your way to the top and stay on the top. We see this perpetuated in Television shows like "The Apprentice" where the young up and coming junior executives get to try to out do each other in the corporate art of backstabbing.

But the truth is that the world's standard of greatness or success only leads to emptiness. *"One of the most common refrains we hear from those who have reached the pinnacle of success is that of the emptiness that still stalks their lives, all their successes notwithstanding. That sort of confession is at least one reason the question of meaning is so central in life's pursuit. Although none like to admit it, what brings purpose in life for many, particularly in countries rich in enterprising opportunities, is a higher standard of living, even if it means being willing to die for it. Yet, judging by the remarks of some who have attained those higher standards, there is frequently an admission of disappointment. After his second Wimbledon victory, Boris Becker surprised the world by admitting his great struggle with suicide.*

*Jack Higgins, the renowned author of The Eagle Has Landed, has said that he had known as a small boy is this: "When you get to the top, there's nothing there."* [Ravi Zacharias, Can Man Live Without God. (Dallas: Word, 1994) p. 56]

But as I stated at the beginning Jesus used two words to tell us what greatness is all about. First he said in verse twenty-six that *"whoever wants to be among you must first be a servant."* Did you know that the word "servant" here is the Greek word that we translate "deacon." The word says that greatness is found in being served and Jesus says that greatness is found in serving others. In verse twenty-seven he uses the second key word and the second command, he says that whoever will be first must become a slave. The Greek word is (doulos) and it means a person whose sole interest is the will of the one being served.

*A True Servant Discovers Real Greatness Is Found In Serving Christ And...*

*Third, A True Servant Finds His Greatest Example in Jesus (v. 28)*

*"just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Jesus is both our example and our motivation.

Basin Theology

Even at the last meal that Jesus had with His disciples it was clear that they still had a lot to learn about being a servant. In John 13 we see Jesus and His disciples sharing a Passover

meal together when according to verse four, Jesus *“rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. (5) After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (6) Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” (7) Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”*

*(8) Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!”*

The guests had to travel by foot over the dusty roads of that day. Their feet would have been very dirty by the time they arrived at their destination. So the normal practice was for the host to have a servant or slave at the door to wash the feet of each guest and dry them. It was a disagreeable job but it had to be done if the guest were to enjoy the meal and the fellowship together. Don’t forget that they did not sit around a table as we do today, but rather they reclined around table each person head would be at the feet of the one next to him. Hey if your feet are going to be close to my head I want them to be clean!

All the disciples knew that their feet were dirty and needed to be washed before the meal but not one of them was prepared to do this. They all thought that they were too important to perform such a lowly task. Charles Swindoll says, *“The room was filled with proud hearts and dirty feet. The disciples were willing to fight for a throne, but not a towel.”*

[Charles Swindoll. Improving Your Serve. p. 164]

After waiting for some time and seeing that there was no one made an effort to wash their feet, Jesus took off His outer garments, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

Peter didn’t like that Jesus, as the guest of honor, was doing this. Have you ever wondered why Peter was so upset that Jesus was washing their feet? It was because Peter knew it wasn’t his responsibility. Washing feet was the job of the lowest of slaves. But Jesus did not believe that doing this in any way diminished His power or authority.

D.L. Moody once said, *“We can easily be too big for God too us, but never too small.”* I believe that Peter eventually learned that lesson.

In fact I don’t think that Peter ever forgot the image of Jesus taking off his outer garments and replacing them with a towel to do the work of a slave. I believe that he had this image in his mind when he wrote in 1 Peter 5:5, *“... and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”*

The apostle Paul give further instruction in the art of being a servant in Philippians 2:3-9 where he wrote, *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (4) Let each of you look out not only for his*

*own interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, (7) but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (9) Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name"*

Note with me four things that Paul says about servant hood. First, Servant hood is found in an unselfish attitude – *"Look out for the interest of others"* (v. 4) Secondly, Servant hood is not worrying about what other think – *"he made himself of no reputation."* (v. 7) Third, Servant hood is being humble – *"he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death."* (v. 8) True humility is found in not worrying about who gets the credit for something. Fourth, and finally, servant hood is giving up your own rights.

Paul's own example in this regard is seen 1 Corinthians 9:3-13, *"My defense to those who examine me is this: (4) Do we have no right to eat and drink? (5) Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (6) Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? (7) Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? (8) Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? (9) For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? (10) Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. (11) If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? (12) If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. (13) Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? (14) Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."* Paul was willing to sacrifice his rights in order that the work might not be hindered.

## Conclusion

It was stated that Dave Thomas the founder of Wendy's Hamburger Chain, once appeared on the cover of their annual report dressed in a knee-length work apron holding a mop and a plastic bucket. Here's how he described the photo; *"I got my MBA long before my GED. At Wendy's MBA does not mean Master of Business Administration. It means Mop Bucket Attitude."* Jesus is still looking for individual who will follow his example and adopt a Basin Theology and a Mop Bucket Attitude.