Three Sermons On Servanthood

I. Studying Jesus

Grace Christian Fellowship is a church filled with people desiring to serve. For example, Kao Lor’s fiancé needed a place to stay for four weeks. We put out the word and both the Poolers and the Nelson’s immediately responded.

Speaking of Kao, he has been serving the church by mowing the church lawn and providing his own gas.

Lisa Ulrich leads our nursery. She serves courageously often doing the job of ladies that down show up.

Troy and Joy served the church by throwing a party at their house last week at great expense to themselves.

Jennifer Huseland spent hours over the summer designing a children’s Sunday School curriculum.

Chris Kuperstein, Stephen Johnson, and Scott Lilly have all donated much time helping us with church computers.

The musicians arrive at 7:00 to practice so that they can serve us on Sunday morning.

We are a church of servants, but we are also a church that is a work in process. We are growing, and yet we would all admit that we have a long way to go if we would serve like Jesus Christ.

Today begins a three week series on servanthood. Some of you are well on your way, and for you this will be a tune-up. Others are new Christians. You have given little thought to what servanthood practically looks like. Some of you are not Christians. For you these sermons are an invitation to join us in the Christian life.
The title of this morning’s sermon is “Studying Jesus. We learn to serve by studying Jesus.” It want to make two points. 1st Servanthood Mandated, and 2nd Servanthood Modeled.

A. SERVANTHOOD MANDATED

Last week’s sermon was on justification. We are justified by faith alone and nothing else.

For the next three weeks we want to focus on sanctification. Sanctification is a big word. It is a word to describe the process of growth in godliness, or growth in Christ-likeness. Growth in servanthood is at the heart of sanctification.

What is the connection between justification and sanctification? We serve because we have been justified. We don’t serve to get justified? Justification always precedes sanctification. Wise Christians always separate justification from sanctification. I am justified by faith alone. I am not justified by being sanctified.

There is an irony in all of this. Those who really believe that they are justified by faith alone are more apt to grow in sanctification. Those who attempt to get justified by being more sanctified never get justified or sanctified.

That brings us to our main idea. Serving is not optional for Christians. The Gospel is the gospel of the Kingdom of God. In the words of Psalm 103:19 “The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.” By definition a Christian is someone seeking to come under the Lordship of Christ, someone attempting to make Christ King and Lord of their life. A Christian is someone who has settled the issue of ownership. Who owns me? Who directs me? That is the crucial question. I want to read two scriptures that make the necessity of servanthood clear.

Matthew 16:24–26 (pg 822) Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” 25
For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Following Christ means “denying” yourself, “taking up your cross,” and “following Christ.” To not do this is to “forfeit your soul.”

Luke 14:25–27 (pg 874) Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus tells us that we “cannot be his disciple” twice. First, if we do not “hate” our immediate family members we cannot be his disciple, and second if we do not “hate” our “own life” we cannot be his disciple.

Again, it appears that Jesus is describing justification by works. So, how do we reconcile these texts with last week’s sermon, Justification by Faith Alone?

Answer: Justifying Faith is something that God gives us. It is something God does to us. The effect of justifying faith is called New Birth. At New Birth God gives us a share in his divine nature. That nature is the nature of servant. It desires to serve. New Birth is a change of nature from one that doesn’t want to serve to one that does.

For example, the nature of a vulture is different from ours. He has different tastes and likes.

In summary, the divine nature impels growing servanthood. Everything that I will say for the next three weeks will presume that you have been justified by faith alone, that you are born of God and that you want to grow in servanthood.

We have established that growth in servanthood is essential. So the logical next question is how? How can we grow in
servanthood? Answer: We grow in our capacity to serve to the degree that we study Jesus.

**B. SERVANTHOOD MODELED**

What we see in Jesus is the nature of the Father. Jesus told his disciples, “if you have seen me you have seen the Father.” Probably the best description of the Divine Nature occurs in Phil. 2:5-11.

Philippians 2:5–11(pg 980) 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This text tells us two important facts. 1st It tells us what motivated Jesus’ service. 2nd It tells us what characterized Jesus’ service.

1. **What motivated Jesus Service?**

We can discern two motives in this passage.

1st Love motivated Jesus. Primarily it was love for his Father. His service was always first to his Father not people. He denied equality with his Father (vs 6). He obeyed his Father (vs 7-8). He did all of this for the glory of his Father (vs 11).

Love for his Church was a very important secondary motive.

2nd Reward was a crucial motivator. Jesus knew the immutable rule written into the fabric of ultimate reality. “He that humbles himself will be exalted.” He humbled himself confident that he could not out-give his Father. The Father was faithful.
9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2. What Characterized Jesus Service?

Behind all of Jesus’ service was a mental outlook, a way of looking at the world. Verse 5 describes it. “Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus.” Notice: If you are a Christian it is already yours. As we have already seen, you have received a share in the divine nature. However, the seed of divine life requires nurturing and watering in order to grow. That divine nature is a mentality, or mindset, that loves to go down. It delights to find and take the lowest place. Jesus modeled it with seven steps down.

1st Renunciation of Equality. 6 “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

2nd Renunciation of Rights. 7a “but made himself nothing.” The Greek Word translated “made himself nothing” implies self-emptying. Jesus could not empty himself of his divinity. But he could empty himself of the rights or perks of divinity. That is what he did.

Americans emphasize their rights (Civil rights, Women’s rights, Homosexual rights, Disabled people’s rights, Children’s rights, etc.) and deemphasize their responsibilities. Servants emphasize their responsibilities even while they renounce their rights.

3rd Voluntary Slavery. 7b “taking the form of a servant [slave].”

“The most convincing evidence of the possession of freedom is the willingness to surrender it to achieve a worthy goal. The supreme example of this, of course, is the incarnation. The divine Logos...chose to surrender that freedom and assume ‘the form of a slave (doulos).’”—Murray Harris

A slave has no rights.

A slave has no freedom.
A slave has only one duty, to serve his master.

4th Infinite Descent. 7c “Being born in the likeness of men.” Because he renounced his equality with the Father, because he emptied himself of his rights, and took on the mindset of a slave, he was willing to take a human nature to himself.

Edwards: “The creation of the world was a very great thing, but not so great as the incarnation of Christ. It was a great thing for God to make the creature, but not so great as for the Creator himself to become a creature. We have spoken of many great things that were accomplished between the fall of man and the incantation of Christ: but God becoming man was greater than all.”

5th Humbled by Obedience. 8a “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient.”

All disobedience to God is an expression of pride, of self exaltation. It says, “I am God. I know what is best for myself.”

All obedience is an act of self humbling. It says that God is God and I am not.

6th Submitted to Death. 8b”To the point of death.”

Death was the penalty for sin.

Jesus was sinless. He would have never died.

But, he humbled himself, and took our sin upon himself, and submitted to the injustice of death in our place.

7th Submitted to Death by Crucifixion. 8c “Even death on a cross.”

Summarize with the Seven Steps down Graphic.

This passage is a portrait of Christ’s character. It is a portrait of his moral beauty. Since Jesus said “if you have seen me you have seen the Father,” it is also a portrait of our Heavenly Father’s
character. It is a portrait of his moral beauty. God loves to serve. God loves to submit to authority. He delights to exercise servant authority. He loves to take the lowest place. He rejoices to spend himself for the welfare and happiness of his beloved.

All of this God the Father and God the Son did for Enemies, not friends.

**C. Application: Three Questions**

1. *Have you settled the issue of authority?*
   
   Have you enthroned Christ in the center of your life? Have you told the Father that you will serve and follow him no matter what it costs? Your marriage? Your children? The love and respect of your extended family? The promotion at work? Your money? That new car? Bigger home in the more prestigious neighborhood? Vacation to Hawaii? Free time for yourself to relax?

   You are not a Christian until you have settled this issue—until you have enthroned Christ in the center of your life.

2. *Are you clear about the difference between Justification and Sanctification?*
   
   Do you understand that you serve God and man because you have been justified? Are you clear that we don’t serve to get justified?

3. *Are You Studying Jesus?*

   Studying Jesus is an activity that energy, perseverance, and concentration. It means the practice of the spiritual disciplines? Watching Jesus affects the believer two ways.
   
   1st Watching Jesus provokes worship.

   2nd Watching Jesus motivates us want to serve like he serves.

   • Do you hunger to serve and go lower?
• Do you repent when self-exaltation and self-centeredness rise up in your heart?
• Does your faith take you beyond your comfort zone? Are you willing to inconvenience yourself for the advancement of God’s kingdom and glory?
• Has Christianity changed you, or is your self-life relatively untouched?
• Do you pray for the desire to grow in your capacity to serve?
• Does your serving start at home?
• Do you serve your boss, customers, and fellow workers?
• Do you serve God by taking appropriate rest?
• Do you serve for the right reasons? Guilt is the wrong reason. Love for God is the right reason. Confidence in God’s willingness to reward is a right reason.
  Fear of man is the wrong reason. Love for man is the right reason.
• When you fail, when you act selfishly, are you able to apply God’s justifying grace to your conscience?

In summary, watching Jesus does three things for us. 1st It motivates us to love God. 2nd It motivates us to be like Jesus. 3rd It provides us with grace upon grace when we fail.

**D. Home Group Study Questions**

Read Matt 16:24-26 and Luke 14:25-27. Explain how you reconcile the demands in these passages with Justification by Faith Alone.
Read Phil 2:5-11. Can you indentify Jesus seven steps down in this passage?

This sermon mentioned three things that motivated Jesus to take these seven steps down. How many can you remember?

What do Jesus seven steps down tell us about the mentality or mindset that goes with godliness?

Who does God want you to serve better?

Where is God asking you to serve?

What obstacles need to be removed from your life to enable you to serve in a more Christ-like way?