

Called to Serve  
Matthew 20:25-28

In Matthew 20:25, Jesus calls his disciples (followers) together and says, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.” This is what it means to be great in the world. People are considered great when they give orders and demand service. Greatness is measured by how many people serve you.

In the first part of Matthew 20:26, Jesus says, “No so with you.” Jesus says, “That’s not the way it works in my kingdom. Let me tell you what kingdom greatness is all about.”

Listen to the Word of the Lord. Jesus says, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man [Jesus] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:26-28).

What a contrast. In the world, greatness is measured by how many people serve you. But in Christ’s kingdom, greatness is measured by how many people you serve.

A corporate executive who served as an elder at a large urban church understood the difference between worldly greatness and kingdom greatness. This is how he explained it. He said, “When I was promoted to the senior management team of my company, I got a parking space with my name on it right by the door. When I became a church elder, I got to leave my car four blocks away to free up space in the church parking lot.”

Listen carefully. Greatness in Christ’s kingdom isn’t about power and privilege; it’s about submission (see Eph. 5:21) and service ...it’s about laying down rights and lifting up people.

This morning I’d like to share six principles that’ll help you to become great in Christ’s kingdom – six principles of biblical servanthood.

First, to become great in Christ’s kingdom you and I need to serve from a place of fullness, not emptiness.

Jesus served from a place of fullness. John 13:3 says, “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning God.” Jesus knew who he was and where he was going. He knew that he was the Son of God and that ultimately he would return to his heavenly Father. This confident awareness of his identity and destiny – his place of fullness – enabled him to serve freely.

Do you have a confident awareness of your identity and destiny? Do you realize that as a human being you are created “in the image of God” (see Gen. 1:27) and that you can have a spiritual relationship with God (see John 4:24)? And do you realize that if you have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord (see John 1:12), you are a child of God and a co-heir with Christ (see Rom. 8:16,17). Do you realize who you are and what’s in store for you?

People who understand you they are as human beings and who they are in Christ are set free to serve God. They are secure, solid, and healthy enough to align with God’s purposes. They can pursue their mission in life – the good works God prepared for them in advance to do – with humble confidence.

Do you understand who you are and where you're going? If you don't, it's time that you do! Understanding and acting on your place of fullness will enable you to serve freely.

Second, to become great in Christ's kingdom you and I need to make sure our needs are met so we can focus on the needs of others.

As followers of Jesus we say that it's not about us and we talk about putting others first. This is cool ... I'm okay with this ... to a certain extent. Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us that "there is a time for everything." Yes, we need to focus on meeting the needs of others, but we also need to take care of ourselves.

Last week we talked about knowing our limits. Jesus knew his limits. For the most part he put others first and served people unselfishly, unconditionally, and sacrificially. But there were times when he stopped serving and took off into the hills to rest and replenish his body and spirit.

Our divine design requires rest, relaxation, recreation, and renewal of our relationship with God. We need these things. These things are vital. Joyful service happens when our own needs are satisfied in such a way that we can forget about ourselves and concentrate on the needs of others.

Make time to rest and relax. Make time to do what you enjoy. Make time to be with God. Renew your body and spirit so you can take your eyes off yourself and look at where you can use your gifts and passion to serve God by serving others.

Third, to become great in Christ's kingdom you and I need to make a conscious commitment to use our God-given gifts for him.

Life is about choices. God has given us the freedom to choose whatever we want. This is how God designed us ... this is who we are ... this is what we're stuck with. God leaves the choice of serving or not serving in our hands. But he also tells us that if we DO the works he's prepared for us to do ... if we DO what he calls us to do ... we will experience lasting joy.

Listen to the Word of the Lord. In John 15:10,11, Jesus says, "If you obey my commands [if you do what I want you to do ... if you do what I call you to do], you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

Folks, this is what it comes down to. We can either be self-serving – we can do things for selfish reasons – and at best experience momentary happiness OR we can serve God by serving others – we can do what God wants us to do ... what he calls us to do – and experience the joy of the Lord ... real joy ... lasting joy. What'll it be?

I don't know about you, but I want to experience the joy of the Lord ... a joy that'll give me strength (see Neh. 8:10). And because this is what I want, I'm going to do my best to obey God and fulfill my divine potential. Are you with me?

Let's break this down and make it simple. This is how it works: 1) know what you want – the joy of the Lord; 2) know how to get it – obey God; and 3) go after it with all that you've got – put your heart and soul into it.

Fourth, to become great in Christ's kingdom you and I need to open our hearts to God's purposes ... we need to make ourselves available ... we need to be flexible enough to be used by God for his purposes.

Last week I talked about simplifying our life. For most of us, life is far too complicated, and the reason life is complicated is because we complicate it. We

complicate our life by accumulating too much stuff and doing too many things. It's nice to have stuff and it's nice to be active. But our possessions and busyness should never keep us from serving God and supporting his work like we should.

To align with the purposes of God, we must first make ourselves available to God. We must free up time and financial resources and let God take us to the places HE wants us to go. God will show us the way he wants us to go IF we are willing to walk with him on the path HE has chosen. Proverbs 3:5 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Fifth, to become great in Christ's kingdom you and I need to understand that following God doesn't always result in the world's approval. As follower of Jesus our goal is not to win a popularity contest; our goal is to follow Jesus. As followers of Jesus our goal is not to be right with the world (see 1 John 2:15-17); our goal is to be the light of the world (see Matt. 5:14-16). Jesus wants us to shine in the darkness.

When the light of Jesus exposes the deeds of darkness, people often get upset; sometimes they get hateful. Jesus talks about this in John 15:18-21. He says, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I have spoken to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."

Following Jesus can get you into trouble – not with the Lord but with the world. But that's okay. I'm not looking for the world's approval; I'm looking for the Lord's approval. One day I'm hoping to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Are you with me?

Finally, to become great in Christ's kingdom you and I need to understand that the right place to serve God is where God calls us to serve.

God's servants can be found everywhere, from the board rooms of huge corporations to pockets of urban decay... from the labs of great research hospitals to the streets where volunteers help children cross safely as they walk to school. God can be served in many different ways in many different places.

We can serve God in far away places or we can serve him right where we are. The "where" isn't important; what's important is that we're serving God, doing the good works that he has prepared in advance for us to do.

God wants us to have the heart of a servant (the heart of a servant and the spirit of a warrior). He wants us to serve him with gladness (see Psalm 100:2).

God calls some people to leave their boats and embark upon on a whole new life of service. He calls others to stay right where they are and make life choices that enable them to serve in new ways. Whatever the case may be, God has chosen a path for your life. And until you find that path and walk that path WITH HIM, you will never experience a fulfilled life (see John 10:10). I want to encourage you to find that path – your path – and walk that path with the Lord.