

CrossWay's Vision: Showing Christ Through Service
By Jason Huff
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Matthew 9:35-10:1; 1 Peter 4:8-11; Matthew 20:25-28

Friends, our final Scripture reading this evening comes from Matthew 20:25-28. May God add His blessing on the reading of His holy Word. "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, 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 did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.""

Abraham Lincoln, Steve Jobs, Mother Teresa, and Genghis Khan. You couldn't put together a more radically diverse group – a president, a computing genius, a missionary, and a warlord. But they were all visionaries. One envisioned the end of American slavery, another a radical idea about how technology was supposed to work for us. One saw hope caring for the dying in India; another brought together tribes that united most of what is now China. Very different people and outlooks, but they all had a clear vision for how things should be.

From opening a shop or restaurant to changing the way people think, vision is necessary to get things started. Vision can't stand alone – I might have the vision to create a new television station dedicated to racquetball, but I don't have the capital, the contacts, or the drive to make it happen, and there's probably not enough interest. Football, yes; racquetball, no. But without vision, the possibilities go untapped. Vision gives us a purpose and drive for something better. Not everyone's a visionary; it takes many bright, capable people to get behind someone else's vision to make it a reality. But vision makes it possible to do something different, something more than was done before. Vision is the only way to break out of the status quo.

As Christ's disciples, we follow Jesus' vision, and His vision was that His followers would make more followers, that we would teach others to accept His gift of salvation and trust in God rather than ourselves. The vision of the local church should always be directly connected to what Jesus taught us, how He acted, and how His church has grown throughout the years. But each local church needs to have a vision to reach its community. Without it, we can lose sight of what Jesus would have us do. We need vision to stay focused on our calling from Christ.

CrossWay's vision has been on every bulletin we've printed, right under our name, the very first thing. We're so used to it, we might miss it. But turn there with me. This is why we exist: "Our vision is to lead others toward a life-changing relationship with Jesus through service, invitation, fellowship, and the teaching of God's Word, encouraging them to faithfully follow as His disciples." For a year and a half, we have grown closer together and regrouped. Now it's time to move forward together, in faith, under this godly vision.

The first part of the vision statement shapes the rest. "Our vision is to lead others toward a life-changing relationship with Jesus." Everything else is about the "how," but this is the "why." This provides the foundation for everything we do. The "how" must always fit the "why."

In the last year and a half, the Session and I have worked to determine if all the different things we do line up with the “why.” There are a couple of things we used to do we don’t do anymore because they were kind things, nice things, but they didn’t give us the opportunity to grow closer to Jesus or to others or bring people closer to Him. The “how” of the vision statement is always bound to the “why.”

Our purpose is to lead others toward a life-changing relationship with Jesus. When we serve, when we invite, when we fellowship, when we teach, when we encourage discipleship, we do it with this purpose in mind. We only succeed if we succeed in this. Jesus is always front and center. This is not just about evangelism but about each one of us here. As we interact with each other, with the friends we’ve made here, the “why” is the same...we are helping each other to become better disciples, better followers, of Jesus.

With that in mind, we’ll study key components of how we lead others and each other towards God, and we’ll do so by looking at how Jesus and the early church did it. The first thing that pops out in the life of Jesus is His service to others. In every gospel, Jesus begins teaching, He calls His disciples, and then He does miracles. The teaching isn’t detailed, but the miracles that He does for others are, whether it’s turning water into wine at a wedding party in Cana or casting out a demon from a possessed man. His teaching and service go hand in hand.

Jesus states in Matthew 20 that He came to serve humanity. He says, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” His teaching, His life, His death, was all for us. Jesus glorified His Father through serving us. Before Jesus and the disciples celebrated His final Passover meal with them, Jesus washed their feet, a task so low that even slaves could not be commanded to do it. There was nothing He would not do to serve us. As His followers, we walk the same path.

Each passage today teaches us key truths about service, so let’s start with Matthew 9. It describes all Jesus did for others – He taught, preached, healed. But the first key is, *He went*. Jesus traveled to meet the crowds. Rabbis stayed in one place and let young men come to them. But Jesus went wherever there was need – “through all the towns and villages,” in verse 35.

Service doesn’t only happen on a mission trip or someplace far away. You can serve your next door neighbor, your community, your co-workers. But most service means going. We serve a few people through our Meal and a Movie Night, and that’s awesome. But we’ve got to take the gospel out to others. We’ve got to serve where people are.

Newspaper advertising has become ineffective at bringing people to church, and it’s a national trend. It’s because unchurched people aren’t looking to find a church to go to in the newspaper. People who have little interest in God rarely start looking for Him without someone touching their lives and encouraging them to find Him. We want them to come and see what’s going on at CrossWay; we want them to experience worship and the goodness of God in our family of faith. But before they come and see, they have to be met where they are. That’s what Jesus did. As we think about service, we should be thinking, “Where can we have an impact in our community by serving in Christ’s name?”

The second key in Matthew 9 is this: *service in Jesus' name is compassionate*. Verse 36, Jesus "had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Jesus wasn't obligated to serve the people He met; they had no right to demand His help. But He did it with compassion because He understood they had little; they were looked down upon by the religious elite; they had no hope. Jesus didn't just give them aid; He showed them kindness. He has sympathy for them.

Compassion is personal. The whole of the incarnation, Jesus coming to live with us and be one of us, was God empathizing with us, rescuing us from our darkness, personally. God didn't send a surrogate, an angel of some sort. He didn't even send another great prophet like Moses. He came Himself. The Father sent the Son. Jesus took it upon Himself, it became His personal responsibility, to secure our salvation. That's true compassion.

Our political discussions as of late have lost the idea of compassion. On one far side of the argument, there is a lack of care for other human beings – those people aren't our people, so we have no obligation to them. That's not a Christian viewpoint.

On the other far side of the argument, there's the thought that our government can fix it all, let everybody in, give everybody jobs, provide for everyone, the government as savior. That seems more compassionate, but it's not, and it's not Christian either. Because compassion is personal; you can't build compassion into bureaucracy. Bureaucracy fails almost as often as a complete lack of care does because in both situations, there's no genuine compassion, no personal touch – which is what we long for, what we need. We need Jesus, and we need His compassion. Without Him and His compassion, nothing works out right.

We are all different and God will give us different ways to serve, but every kind of true Christian services comes out of the wellspring of compassion God plants in us as believers. It is not easy to be compassionate to someone we don't know or don't trust, someone very different from us, or someone who needs help we don't know how to give. As we think about serving, let's pray that God would give us a heart of compassion towards others...that somewhere, within some part of ourselves, we would have a heart for those in need.

The third key in Matthew 9 is simply this: *your service is vital*. Jesus told the disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." You are a key part of the Lord's plan to save the world.

God's people have always struggled with this. Just a short time after the church began, they had to sort out who was responsible for different kinds of service – that's when the role of deacon came about as a specific kind of helper distributing food to the needy. Further along in church history, sadly, the role of servant was given to the priests and monks; they were seen as "special" Christians. That filtered down into today's church, where sometimes people feel that they give money to the church so the pastor can do their spiritual service.

That's not the way it was intended. But just as the church many centuries ago made the mistake of believing that service wasn't for every Christian, the modern church has fallen into the trap of becoming a business where people consume religious goods and services. Most church attendees don't serve; they go to church to be served. They want to feel assured that things are OK, that they will go to heaven when they die, and they will go where they hear that. Sadly, the church has been ready to do that as long as the bills get paid and more people come in the doors. But that's not God's plan. God's intention is for all of us to be workers for Him.

Your service is needed and necessary. God wants to use you in service. Literally as I was writing this part of my sermon, Jehovah's Witnesses came to the door. The day before, the Mormons came by. Coldest it's been in nine months and they are out peddling a counterfeit gospel that doesn't teach the real Jesus. But they are serving as they know how. Even false religions know people are impressed by the service of the average person trying to help others.

Jesus wants to use each one of us in His service so that He might be seen through us. Few people who claim to be Christians are actually willing to serve. Friends, most of us here have served and want to serve more, and so I commend you. I am encouraging myself, and I am encouraging you, to do more and more of it. If we don't, who will? The Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses? The atheist trying to prove he can be a good person without God? We have a God who has served us. He wants us to serve. He desires us to serve. We can be those workers in the harvest fields, and we can find our joy in that service.

The fourth key is from Matthew 20: *our service is commanded, yet we are awarded and acclaimed for that service.* Throughout the New Testament, Scripture tells us we are to live a life as slaves to God and to righteousness. We hate that word "slave" because of American history, which was a particular form of slavery where innocents were kidnapped and sold into lifelong labor. It was awful. But the word "slave" in its original context is important because it shows us the depth of our bond with God.

Servants in Jesus' day were hired help who could come and go as they pleased – not all that different from what you see on *Downton Abbey* and British servants. Slaves did not have that right. They had already been paid for their services, and they had to do what the master commanded. While slaves had certain rights, things they couldn't be asked to do, what the lord of the house ordered, they did.

Jesus uses that language here because our service isn't an "if." It's based in our bond with God. We have been claimed by Him, paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. Our service shows our gratitude, for He has purchased us with the blood of Jesus. He owns us. We are His. And that is good for us, because we receive far more from God in His service than we ever return back to Him. Our service to Him is nothing in comparison to His service to us.

But what's more, the one who lives as a servant, as a slave to others in Jesus' name, is acclaimed as great, even first in the Kingdom of God. It's topsy-turvy. The one who would have the least rank in our way of thinking has the greatest rank in God's Kingdom. The servant is the one cheered. The slave is the one acclaimed. When we willingly humble ourselves to serve others, God lifts us up.

Here's our last thought for the day on serving as part of our vision: *we are gifted for the tasks ahead because God uniquely suits us for our service.* Our problem with service is that we see it in the same manner as eating our broccoli or Brussel sprouts or whatever vegetable you hate (I think we've all got one). We only occasionally manage to eat them because they're good for us. But if we could get away with just eating sweets all day, we probably would do it.

But Peter has a different notion of service. In 1 Peter 4, he tells us, "each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." God has gifted us for service and given us unique abilities, talents, and interests that dovetail with what He wants us to accomplish. Service is not to be a burden but a joy.

We've already seen the analogy of the servant or slave in a household. So in the context of a loving master and grateful, devoted servants, where is the master going to put a servant to use? In the place that best fits. It makes no sense for a tailor to be made a bricklayer or a bricklayer a tailor, a seamstress a cook or a cook a seamstress. That way, not only does the work get done well, but the person enjoys the work they do and can get satisfaction from it.

Many people don't serve because they feel they must do something outside of their comfort zone for it to count, and so they serve sparingly. But there's no need for that. Sure, we might do something that isn't in our wheelhouse like helping with a Habitat build or working with seniors on a youth group trip. God works through our weaknesses sometimes. But our regular service to others should bring us joy because it comes out of the way God has made us.

That's why I like projects like the one we do at Military Avenue. For many of us who like to be out of the spotlight, packing groceries makes a difference and fits our personalities. Some of us can talk with those getting bags and give them encouragement. Some of us love to worship there and demonstrate the love of God to those in need. There's room for all to serve. As you think about how you might serve in the name of Jesus, think about what you love to do. Think about how God might be calling you to use that thing you love for His glory.

The movie *Chariots of Fire* is the story of Olympic champion Eric Liddell, who felt called as a missionary to China. At the same time, he felt called to running because, as he put it, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure." He disappointed his sister who thought it couldn't be a way Eric could honor the Lord. But he was dedicated to God. He was willing to miss his Olympic chance because his heat was scheduled on Sunday, and he felt he shouldn't run on Sundays to honor God. That story of faith has now spread the world over...not because he was a missionary, but because he was a runner who served his country through his sport and served his Lord by making God more important than a gold medal. How might God use your interests, passions, and hobbies to serve Him and bring more people to Himself?

As we talk the next several weeks about the vision of CrossWay, I pray that the vision would belong to each of us, that it would not be a statement about an organization but a goal each of us has as part of the CrossWay family. Because we are a family, the family of faith, the family of God. As the next to last page in your bulletin says, "The church is not a location with an address. It is a family on a mission." May God bless us as we act on that mission together.