

Discipleship 101: Serving Like Jesus
By Jason Huff
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Micah 6:8; Titus 3:1-8; John 13:13-17

Our final Scripture reading today comes from John 13:13-17. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “[Jesus said to the disciples,] “You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

You've obviously noticed that I'm not broadcasting today from our living room as I have been throughout the pandemic. We're actually in my mom's condominium. She's been in the hospital dealing with an infection from kidney stones...definitely not a fun experience! You're actually seeing a part of my history here; several of the items on the wall behind me were here when I was growing up. You're seeing in the background a couple of plates and some décor that came out celebrating our nation's 200th anniversary back in 1976. With all that our nation has struggled through during the pandemic and election, having just celebrated Veterans' Day and remembering all of those who have served our nation so bravely over the years, it's kind of appropriate today as we remember all those who have gone before us and we pray for God's hand on our society.

But it's also appropriate that I'm broadcasting from here today as I'm trying to take care of Mom's needs because we've reached the fifth week of Discipleship 101, which I've entitled, “Serving Like Jesus.” This sermon and the title was in place over a month ago, well before I had any idea I might be serving my mom through this health issue, which is proof that God has in mind His plans for us well before we understand them!

We need to understand what it means to serve like Jesus. We've discussed the big picture of world history seen through the lens of faith. We've learned the grace of Jesus that saves us. We've started to establish times set aside during our day for worship, Scripture, and prayer. We've even started to figure out how to love like Jesus did. I'll even put a disclaimer on this week's study that if you aren't committed to loving like Jesus, you can't commit to serving like Jesus either. This week's study naturally follows out of that.

It's so important that we have the love of Jesus in mind before we serve because the impact our service has comes out of our love for others. Have you ever been to a food pantry or a soup kitchen and you've seen someone serving who looks miserable? It sucks the life right out of the room. Sometimes, we serve like we're putting in our community service hours to get out of probation rather than doing it out of the love of the Lord. I can tell you, having been on many mission trips, the huge difference there is in the impact of teens and youth who go because Mom and Dad said to go and because, in their limited understanding, they want to share Jesus' love.

So now that we understand the core of serving like Jesus is love – love for God, love for Jesus, gratefulness for His loving care and salvation – what does that service look like? The first one I’m going to talk about today is this: *serving like Jesus means serving unnoticed*.

We might be surprised to think of Jesus serving unnoticed. Jesus is known for His miracles; everyone knew He did them, even His enemies, maybe especially His enemies, because they knew the miracles drew people to Him. But a great deal of the time, Jesus goes unnoticed intentionally. Think with me to the wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned a huge amount of water into wine. Only the servants knew what Jesus had done. Jesus didn’t want the focus on Him; it was a wedding! The focus was on the bride and groom! Jesus was content to let the celebrations continue, serving in the shadows.

Sometimes, Jesus told people to keep their healing a secret because He knew that it was best. He wanted people to be healed; He wanted to serve them. Yet Jesus knew that miracles alone wouldn’t convince people. He refused to do miracles for the Pharisees as “proof” that He was the messiah because it wouldn’t make them believe – and because it wouldn’t be in service to others. He regularly kept His service out of sight because His whole life was not about glorifying Himself but glorifying the Father and living in integrity.

This doesn’t mean that every service we do in the name of Jesus is done without anyone knowing. The apostles coordinated the first deacons of the church to take care of the widows and needy in their midst, so serving like Jesus can take shape within the church. It’s no sin to be part of a team that regularly serves the community as part of the local church. You won’t lose your blessing by serving together. But it’s not about the recognition for us; it’s about God being glorified.

Through much of Acts, the Holy Spirit leads disciples, they see a need, and whether or not they got any recognition, they did what they could to help. This continued well beyond the era the Bible records. I do not know who in the early church decided to rescue infants left out to die by their Roman neighbors. I know a lot of Christians did this because it became common knowledge. No one became famous for it; they just did it, and history recorded it.

As a family church, a small church, a church affected by COVID in such a way that we don’t have a place to meet together right now, a lot of your serving like Jesus is going to come as you see needs arise around you. A co-worker needing a meal when her husband gets sick; a neighbor who needs a battery jumped because he hasn’t used his car in a while working from home; a friend’s child who needs some help with pre-Algebra because they just don’t understand it like they did when they were in person.

Those aren’t things we at CrossWay can coordinate. We’re still doing Operation Christmas Child, and there’s still time to do a box or two if you haven’t, we’re still coordinating certain things, but serving like Jesus means being willing to help when nobody’s looking, when there’s no credit, nobody coordinating it, lending a hand or a few greenbacks or whatever’s necessary. Serving like Jesus means that maybe only your Father in heaven sees, and that’s OK.

How else do we serve like Jesus? Our passage today from John 13 lays the groundwork for perhaps the most important lesson we have about serving like Jesus, and it's this: *servicing like Jesus means nothing is beneath you in your service to others*. Today, all of us are shocked by the miracles in the Bible, particularly all of Jesus' miracles. For a few hundred years now, we've tried to explain them away. Some lousy scholars and preachers try to call them mythology of an ancient civilization, and we advanced people know better.

The people in the ancient world were shocked by miracles too; Jesus' miracles left them in awe. Yet they also expected they would come from the Messiah. Jesus' miracles were earth-shattering, and yet there was no one who did not think that the Messiah wouldn't be anything less than a great and powerful figure with the hand of God on Him, able to do the things Moses and Elijah and the other prophets did.

What made Jesus truly shocking to the ancient world, and made Him unpalatable to many, was the way that He humbled Himself and became nothing. The fact that He would go to the cross, which was not only painful but utterly and completely humiliating, was a step too far for the Roman world of glory and honor. But even if you could write off the shame of the cross, you could not write off that Jesus willingly and intentionally washed the disciples' feet and made it a command that they wash one another's feet.

As many of you who have been with me for a long time have heard, there was no task so degrading in ancient Near Eastern culture. Scholars have debated whether or not a slave could even be asked to wash his master's feet. In a society that devalued women, it's not completely certain if female servants were given the task. Yet Jesus willingly and intentionally does it and uses it to set an example. The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the One through whom all creation came to be, washes the muck and mire off the feet of those with Him.

How many jobs do we think are beneath us today? When I was young and arrogant, I thought plenty of things were beneath me. I have to be careful not to think that some things still are. I am always amazed how many times an important ministry in a church goes unfulfilled because no one feels "led" to do it. Or we say, "That's not my gifting." And so people go unfed, faithful volunteers burn out, and we miss opportunities to help the Kingdom of God expand.

I know of several large churches whose child care ministries, whose youth and families ministries, are completely dependent on paid staffers. One gets sick and the whole system goes down, even though there are many people in those churches, because no one will volunteer. And on the other side of it, I'm amazed to see small churches grow and do so much in the community simply because their people are willing to volunteer.

Servicing like Jesus isn't always servicing in our area of greatest strengths but servicing so that others can do so. I think of the gal who comes in at Compassion every week and cleans. Handles all the bathrooms, takes out all the trash, makes sure we have enough toilet paper and soap and hand towels. I doubt that's what she feels her calling in life is to do. And yet she does it really well, and I'm always glad to see her on Mondays. When she's away, the center suffers.

I think too of a young man I know who worked his way through his studies as a janitor so that he could get his degree and teach kids in the love of Jesus. He's suffered through people's whispers about his job so that he could be qualified to serve in the area that Jesus called him to serve. God bless him!

I am also reminded of our EPC missionaries when they are called to share the gospel in foreign lands with people who are often hostile to the message. They take pledges showing they know the risks; they are laying down their lives to serve Christ, not only metaphorically but realizing that it might be what they face to share Christ on the mission field. God bless them too!

I want to challenge us with this. What wouldn't we do for Christ? Whose feet wouldn't we wash? What job is too below our station? Let's renounce those things. And let's engage in actively finding a place to serve. Instead of never serving because we haven't found our calling, let's serve in whatever capacity is needed until God points out the perfect place for us to serve.

And let's be honest with ourselves – serving is hard. We must be prepared to face the truth that we may be using excuses about not finding our place or our calling because we just don't want to serve. It's easy to get so wrapped up in our lives that service goes on the permanent back-burner. That Jesus would do the lowest thing points out the fact we have a hard time doing *anything*. Friends, let's let the example Jesus set show us the way towards serving even when it's difficult or seems beneath us.

And that brings me to our final thought today, the amazing thing that only God could do through our service: *when we serve unnoticed and unrecognized in humble roles for the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom expands and people take notice*. It's ironic, isn't it? It appears that everything you do for the Kingdom goes under the radar, working hard, in small assignments, in little ways. And yet that work goes noticed and appreciated by the Father. It makes a huge Kingdom impact whether you realize it or not. The work you did so other people can shine laid the foundation, and it will not go unrewarded.

Jesus was not terribly well known in His own lifetime. He came from Galilee, a long way from Judea; He makes Capernaum in Galilee, a city of 1,500 people, His base of operations and not Jerusalem. He does not travel to Greek or Roman towns; He makes waves in Jerusalem but is seldom there. He travels the highways and byways, going to little villages and tiny hamlets. His ministry is rarely to the thousands fed by a miracle but to thirty here and forty there. Israel was considered the backwater of the Roman Empire. Had Jesus stayed dead and His disciples scattered, had He not been the Son of God, He wouldn't be a footnote in history.

And yet in the course of forty years, one biblical generation, the entire Roman empire has heard about Jesus; they're in upheaval about Him, and are for the next 250 years until the empire officially becomes Christian. In God's topsy-turvy, upside way, the way to exaltation comes not through seeking power but serving all the way to the cross. Jesus, the One who humbly served rather than being served, lights the way for all of humanity for all the ages to come. Long after He ascended into heaven after His resurrection, we are still talking about Jesus.

We simply don't see the ripples in history created when we serve humbly and simply for the Kingdom of God. The history books are written about presidents and tyrants and warlords and men and women of renown. But God's history is different. God remembers the faithful and their service, not the kings and queens of the world. And the impact of a person's service makes all the difference.

We have our Bibles today because scribes over the last 6,000 years painstakingly copied it word for word, letter for letter. We know very few of them, but we have a trustworthy Scripture today because they served. I'm here in part because a faithful couple long since dead taught Sunday school to second graders for decades. I doubt in their lifetimes they had any idea. We may not know until we meet Jesus what kind word, thoughtful deed, or act of service we did made a huge impact on someone's life. All we know is that the only ones that will be unrewarded are the ones left undone.

I want to finish today with a little story about some folks that are near and dear to my heart named Tom and Beth. They've been good friends of mine for a very long time, Beth since elementary school, Tom a little after. They've been married 23 years. They've both always wanted to serve the Lord. Beth's a scientist. Tom studied music education, worked at the missionary agency I was with for a while, went to seminary, was a music director and missions pastor for a church for a while, but things never quite settled with him being a pastor, and he now directs the orchestra for Southport High School.

Their path of service has taken a different turn. They don't have biological children, but in those 23 years they have hosted 42 foreign exchange students. They've provided them with family away from home and shared the love of Jesus with them. They don't have a ton of rules but attending church is one of them. Some they've lost track of; others are in regular contact. There are far too many stories to tell in this short slot of time. Besides all the other service for Jesus, this has been a big one.

In the last year and a half, they've helped a student who was brought over from the Congo by a guy trying to make money off of him playing basketball. When it was clear that the guy was bad news, Tom and Beth stepped in and made sure the student had a home, and now they are his legal guardians. And you know what? This week, their story made the newspaper – the school newspaper. Hardly the credit they deserve, but God knows and sees. I can't say just how proud I am of them, and I know my pride is nothing in comparison to God's viewpoint.

Serving like Jesus is tough. Our lives are full. I know because mine is too. My goal today in preaching is not to add guilt to your life, but to say, "How might we serve others so that God is glorified and great good is done?" It doesn't take a million dollars or a church campaign. All it takes is Christians like us determined that we are going to serve like Christ, and the Spirit will lead our way.