

Moving From Comfort to Character

Jesus - the Portrait of a Servant

Text : John 13:4-5; 12-16

Today I want to wrap up my series on Character development. We have talked about developing faith, obedience, commitment, courage, to enable us to move into men and women of integrity, overcoming adversity, and developing a godly heart. In this closing message I want to talk to you about what I think is the most difficult characteristic to develop and in order to portray this characteristic in an honest and complete fashion I want us to look at Jesus. You may be asking what could be harder than developing a heart for God? Well at least I think it's harder. That is developing a heart that is truly that of a servant. So today we're looking to the example of Jesus, who shows us what it means to serve God. This is important, because of the command Christ has given to us: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." - John 20:21 (NIV)

Do you remember the words Jesus spoke just prior to entering Jerusalem to be crucified. (Matthew 20:27-28) Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 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.” Then in John 13 we read 4 Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Then it continues in v. 12-16 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. I believe that it is impossible to be like Christ and not have the heart and characteristic of a servant. Let's look at Isaiah and at what we're told about Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God's suffering servant and see what we can learn about servanthood.

I find it interesting that this is veterans day, a day that we set aside to remember those who sacrificed their lives to protect and gain the freedom for so many they had never even met. I didn't plan for this sermon to be preached on this day, it just happened.

One story that especially bears witness to this is one that took place in World War II. The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened:

A shovel was missing. The Japanese officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot... It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing. Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first checkpoint.

The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! The incident had a profound effect... The men began to treat each other like brothers.

When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, like human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors... instead of attacking their captors, they protected them and insisted: "no more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness."

- I. God would experience rejection, yet he willingly became a servant.
 - A. The prophet says God would do something hard to believe. He would work through One the people wouldn't expect God to work through.
 1. As a result, the Messiah would be rejected by His own people.
 - a. "He came to his own people, and even they rejected him." - John 1:11 (NLT)
 - B. He would be rejected because of His appearance - v. 2
 1. Jesus wasn't an earthly prince or king, He wasn't a man of means or political power. Instead, he was a lowly carpenter from Nazareth.
 2. Mark 6:3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him."
 - C. He would be rejected because of His associations - v. 3
 1. Jesus associated with common people, with tax collectors and sinners.
 2. Matthew 9:10-11- "Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with such scum?' When Jesus heard this, he said, 'Healthy people don't need a doctor - sick people do.' Then he added, 'Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: "I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices." For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.'
 3. For these reasons, He experienced rejection.
 4. But aren't we glad He was willing to suffer rejection?

5. For we are the sinners He came to call to repentance.
 6. The point is, Jesus didn't live for man's approval, but for the Father's approval; and the Father approved of Him showing mercy to others in the effort to see them saved.
 7. We, too, we must reach out to the last, the least, and the lost; to the down and out and the up and out, in the effort to lead them to the saving grace of our Lord, even if in doing so, we face rejection.
- D. "The fear of rejection is the main reason most people don't share their faith with other people.
1. Their afraid of what they will think.
 2. God has given us good news, yet we're afraid to share it.
 3. By taking on the role of a true servant. We do not live to please others, but only to please God.
 4. "If you please God, it doesn't matter who you displease; but if you displease God, it doesn't matter who you please."
 5. Paul wrote in Gal. 1:10 "Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant."

II. But his work was that of redemption

- A. The suffering that Jesus endured on the cross in our place is often called His passion.
1. Jesus, himself, declared that paying the price for the sins of the world was His reason for coming into this world.
 2. Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
- B. If we're going to be sent into the world the way Jesus was sent by the Father, then we need to take on the role of a servant, which means we not only live to please God; but we live to share God's passion.
1. In his book, Satan's 10 Most Believable Lies, David Breese says one lie is "Don't Go To the Cross." In Matthew 16:21-23, Jesus told His disciples He MUST go to Jerusalem, suffer, die, and be raised on the 3rd day. Peter said, "Lord, this can never be." Jesus saw it was Satan speaking, rebuked him and, of course, completed His journey to the cross. Such was His passion to provide salvation for a lost world. Now He calls on His followers to share His passion to see a lost world saved.
 2. "We may be sure that Satan will come to every one of us. He will say, 'Don't be a fool. Don't give yourself to so ridiculous a course as the denial of yourself in order to accomplish some abstract spiritual purpose.' " - David Breese
 3. In Philippians 3:10-11; 12b Paul writes "I want to know Christ

- yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." -

4. Paul lived only to please God and share His passion for the salvation of a lost world. We must, too.
5. Martin Luther King said it well: "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve, you don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve, you don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve, you don't have to know Einstein's Theory of Relativity to serve, you don't have to know the Second Theory of Thermodynamics and Physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love."
6. On September 11, Lt. Col. Brian Birdwell (from U.S. Army Headquarters) had just stepped into a Pentagon hallway when the fireball from the hijacked plane hit him. After recovering from the initial shock, Birdwell realized he was on fire. "Jesus, I'm coming to see you," he remembers praying. When doctors finally attended to him at the Washington Burn Center, they found second- and third-degree burns over 40 percent of Birdwell's body. To save him, they performed several skin graft operations. President George W. and First Lady Laura Bush visited the Washington Burn Center on September 13. Among those they visited was Birdwell. Laura Bush went into Brian's room and spoke to him for about a minute, all the time as if they were life-long acquaintances. She then turned to Brian's wife, Mel, who had been at the hospital for about two-and-a-half days. She was dirty, grimy, and wore a bloodstained shirt. Despite this, Laura hugged her for what Mel said seemed like an eternity, just as if Mel was one of her closest family members. Laura then told Brian and Mel that there was "someone" there to see him. The President walked in. Standing by Brian's bedside, the President told Colonel Birdwell that he was very proud of them both and regarded them as heroes. The President then saluted Brian. Brian slowly began to return the salute, taking about 15 to 20 seconds to get his hand up to his head because of his bandaged arms. During all of this, President Bush never moved. He dropped his salute only when Brian was finished with his. Birdwell lives now with renewed purpose. "I'm a walking miracle. Christ got me out of the fire. In him not taking me, that means I have a mission to complete. He'll tell me what it is in due time."

III. His victorious resurrection - vs. 10-12

- A. Isaiah says despite the suffering the Messiah would endure for the sins of the world, He would ultimately emerge victorious -
 - 1. "He will see the light of life and be satisfied" - a reference to his resurrection. The promise of the resurrection enabled our Lord to endure his suffering.
 - 2. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross . . ." - Hebrews 12:2
- B. Now, Jesus calls us to live to only please God and share His passion; and assures us that in doing so, we discover true life - resurrection life!
- C. "You must put aside your own pleasures and shoulder your cross, and follow me closely. If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw away their lives for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will ever know what it means to really live." - Mark 8:34-35 (Living Bible)
- D. Christ's promise is if we will live only to please God and to share His passion for a lost world, we'll discover what it means to live life to the full, to live a life that counts, both in time and for eternity!
 - 1. This is what Paul was speaking of in Philippians 3:10-11 when he spoke of "attaining to the resurrection from (among) the dead." This world is full of dead folks, pursuing dead ends. But God calls us to experience life and life to the full (John 10:10) by serving Him!
- E. Illustration: THE BAMBOO SERVANT

Once upon a time, in the heart of an ancient Kingdom, there was a beautiful garden. And there, in the cool of the day, the Master of the garden would walk. Of all the plants of the garden, the most beautiful and beloved was a gracious and noble bamboo.

Year after year, Bamboo grew yet more noble and gracious, conscious of his Master's love and watchful delight. And often when the wind came to revel in the garden, Bamboo would dance and play, tossing and swaying and leaping and bowing in joyous abandon, leading the Great Dance of the garden, which most delighted the Master's heart.

One day, the Master himself drew near to contemplate his Bamboo with eyes of curious expectancy. And Bamboo, in a passion of adoration, bowed his great head to the ground in loving greeting. The Master spoke: "Bamboo, I would use you." Bamboo flung his head to the sky in utter delight. The day of days had come, the day for which he had been made, the day to which he had been growing hour by hour, the day in which he would find his completion and his destiny. His voice came low: "Master, I'm ready. Use me as you wish."

"Bamboo, I would have to take you and cut you down."

A trembling of great horror shook Bamboo. "Cut--me--down? Me...whom you, Master, has made the most beautiful in all your Garden--cut me down? Oh, not

that. Not that. Use me for the joy, use me for the glory, oh Master, but do not cut me down!"

"Beloved Bamboo," The Master's voice grew graver still "If I do not cut you down, I cannot use you."

The garden grew still. Wind held his breath. Bamboo slowly bent his proud and glorious head. There was a whisper: "Master, if you cannot use me other than to cut me down, then do your will and cut."

"Bamboo, beloved Bamboo, I would also cut your leaves and branches from you."

"Master, spare me. Cut me down and lay my beauty in the dust; but would you also have to take from me my leaves and branches too?"

"Bamboo, if I do not cut them away, I cannot use you."

The Sun hid his face. A listening butterfly glided fearfully away. And Bamboo shivered in terrible expectancy, whispering low: "Master, cut away"

"Bamboo, Bamboo, I would yet split you in two and cut out your heart, for if I cut not so, I cannot use you."

Then Bamboo bowed to the ground: "Master, Master--then cut and split."

So did the Master of the garden took Bamboo and cut him down, hacked off his branches, stripped off his leaves, split him in two and cut out his heart. And lifting him gently, the Master carried Bamboo to where there was a spring of fresh sparkling water in the midst of his dry fields. Then putting one end of the broken Bamboo in the spring and the other end into the water channel in the field, the Master gently laid down his beloved Bamboo. And the spring sang welcome, and the clear sparkling waters raced joyously down the channel of Bamboo's torn body into the waiting fields.

Then the rice was planted, and the days went by, and the shoots grew and the harvest came. In that day Bamboo, once so glorious in his stately beauty, was yet more glorious in his brokenness and humility. For in his beauty he was life abundant, but in his brokenness and humility he became a channel of abundant life to his Master's world.

From Tim Smith's Sermon "Humble Servant"

"I have never met a soul who has set out to satisfy the Lord and has not been satisfied himself." - Watchman Nee

Being a servant comes down to basin theology. "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which one will you use?"