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Topic : A Servant's Heart  
Passage : Mark 10 : 35 - 45  
Date : 19 December 2004

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Ramesses II was a king that ruled Egypt around 1200 BC. History records that Egypt was a world power under his rule. Because of this, Ramesses II had a huge ego – he built more statues and monuments dedicated to himself than any other Egyptian king. One particularly famous statue had this inscription :

I am Ozymandias, King of kings,  
If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie,  
Let him surpass any of my works.

Today, about 3000 years later, Egypt is no longer a world power. The famous statue that I referred to has collapsed and is now an exhibit in a museum.

1 John 2 :17 says that “the world and its desires pass away ...”. Power, wealth and influence are temporary. They cannot be carried with you into death. They are forgotten over time.

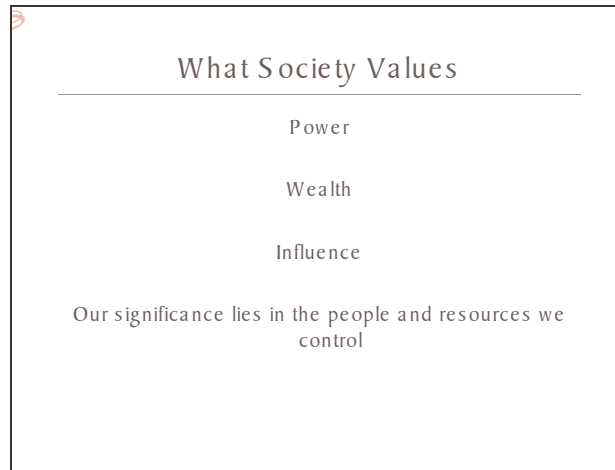
Although these things may be temporary, we see a constant struggle for power, wealth and influence in everyday life. Bosses bully their subordinates. Office workers try to suck up to their bosses, and try to sabotage their colleagues. Pop stars slime each other. Politicians make false accusations against each other. All this in the hope of gaining more power, wealth or influence.

Some of you might be thinking – “I’m not the ambitious sort. I just want to lead a quiet life”. That may be true. But consciously or unconsciously, I think that between family and friends, we might still be guilty of emotional manipulation at some time or other, to get our way.

We see it in children. Many children know that if they cry loudly for long enough, their parents will give in – “ok ok I buy you the toy”.

Sometimes our parents try this on their children too. They say things like “you don’t know how hard I have to work” or “you don’t how much I sacrifice for you”. They want to make us feel guilty, to make us do something for them.

What about couples ? Between me and Joyce, I confess that sometimes I ignore her and sulk when I’m upset with her. I hope that by doing so she will feel guilty about whatever she’s doing and pay attention to me.



As you can see, power play is part of everyday life. This is because the world teaches us that our significance lies in how much we are able to control people or resources. This is because the world teaches us to put our needs before others. To want significance. To want our way. Then, people will look up to us, admire us, listen to us, do what we want.

Should Christians engage in such power play ? We will look for the answers to day in Mark 10 : 35. This passage talks about what significance, or “greatness”, means in the kingdom of God. Let us turn to Mark 10 -

- 35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Jesus, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.
- 36 And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"
- 37 They said to Him, "Grant that we may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your glory."
- ...
- 41 Hearing this, the ten (other disciples) began to feel indignant with James and John.
- 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.

During Jesus' time, the Romans had conquered Israel and were ruling over the Jews. They were rich and influential. Commanders of soldiers and owners of slaves. Some even held the power to throw people into prison, or put them to death. Jesus observed that the Roman rulers lorded it over others. They bullied and pushed people around.

This did not escape the notice of Jesus' disciples. They wanted to be in a position of power too !

At this time, the Jews, including Jesus' disciples, expected Jesus the Messiah to overthrow the Romans and establish a physical kingdom of God. Jesus would be the king, the president, of this kingdom. And James and John wanted to be His vice-presidents ! Naturally, the other disciples also became upset.

Now listen to what Jesus says in reply to His disciples' ambitions. Mark 10 -

- 42 Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.  
43 But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant;  
44 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all.  
45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Should the disciples seek personal significance by controlling people or resources ? Jesus told His disciples "it is not this way among you". God does not measure significance by the world's standards. He does not measure greatness by the number of people or the amount of resources you control. Jesus said that it is the humble servant who is "great", and the "slave" who is first.

I think that most of us are ok with the idea that as Christians we have to attend church, read our Bibles, pray, help out in some church activities, and be nice to other people. But the idea of being a servant sounds drastic.

In Singapore, when we think of servant, we think of the Indonesian or Filipina maid who wakes up at 5 am in the morning to prepare breakfast, who eats the family leftovers, cleans the toilet, and who goes to sleep only after everyone else.

In Jesus' time, servants and slaves had even less human rights. So this suggestion that He had come to serve, and that His disciples should be servants also, was very, very shocking.

I think the first question that crossed the minds of the disciples, which I'm sure is also in our minds today, is "why should I serve ?"

### **Why Should I Serve ?**

Reason 1 : Because Jesus Christ first served and died for us.

In verse 45, Jesus said that even He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. In other words, He came to serve, to the extent of giving up His own life.

I don't think Jesus' disciples fully understood what Jesus was trying to say. So during the Last Supper, when nobody wanted to do the humiliating job of washing feet, Jesus demonstrated servant hood by washing His disciples feet. John 13 : 14 - 15

"Now that I, Your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you".

About 24 hours after that, Jesus demonstrated servant hood another time when he consciously allowed Himself to be captured and crucified on the cross.

Can you imagine the impact that night's events had on the disciples ?

Jesus was taking a walk in the garden when a group of soldiers came to arrest him. However, they were not sure where he was exactly. John 18 records that Jesus stepped out and said "I am He" and "let these disciples go". Jesus deliberately allowed Himself to be captured, and traded His life in exchange for His disciples.

These two acts made the disciples understand what it meant to be served. That is why the attitude of Jesus' disciples completely changed after Jesus gave up His life on the cross. They stopped arguing over who should be greatest, or who should be the leader. They were no longer bothered about controlling people or resources – power, wealth or influence. Instead, their mind was fixed on preaching the word of God and on serving the community. Even imprisonment, torture and execution did not make them change their minds. We are here today as a church because of the first disciples of Jesus wholeheartedly served God and the people, without expectation of material reward and without fear of pain or death. What changed them ? What motivated them ? They were moved by the life of love and service that Jesus first poured out into their lives.

So why do we serve ? We serve because Jesus first served us. Our motivation for serving flows out of the gratefulness that we have for the love and service that Jesus Christ first gave to us.

Today, if you cannot imagine yourself as a servant, the first question you need to seriously ask yourself is this – do I truly understand, have I truly experienced, what it means to be loved and served by Jesus Christ ?

#### Reason 2 : Because of the social and spiritual impact on society

Some of you might have bosses that like to give "motivational talks". They talk about being "empowering employees", being "customer oriented" or "creating job satisfaction". Where I work, this happens quite often. But my colleagues and I never take it seriously, because it is all talk no action – nothing at work actually gets better.

So today, if my boss stood in front of my colleagues and said that "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even I did not come to be served, but to serve ...", we'll all die laughing.

In contrast, I find it interesting that everyone took Jesus seriously when he said those same words. His disciples might not have fully understood what Jesus was trying to teach. But because Jesus was always serving the people around him, no one could doubt the sincerity of his message. In 2 Corinthians 4 : 5, Paul said :

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servant's for Jesus' sake".

Many faithful Christians do the first thing quite well, but despite their efforts, many times they find that people do not take what they say about Jesus Christ seriously. Perhaps it is because Christians have neglected to preach ourselves as servants.

Earlier this year, a man fell down at the Singapore Island Country Club premises and became semi-paralysed. He could not get up by himself. For 20 minutes, he lay there on the road while, several members of the Country Club drove past in their big and expensive cars. They just pretended he wasn't there. Fortunately for him, the Country Club staff discovered him after that.

I hope that none of those rich people who drove past were Christians, because Jesus expects Christians to do the exact opposite.

Most of you are familiar with the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. A Jew was travelling in the countryside when he was robbed and left to die at the road side. Two other Jews – one a priest and the other a temple helper – both “holy” people – walked past and pretended they didn't see him.

A Samaritan passed by. At that time, Samaritans were hated by the Jews. But this “enemy” of the Jews stopped to rescue the man who had been robbed. Jesus praised the Samaritan and said that this is an example of loving your neighbour.

Whereas the prevailing attitude in society encourages people to put themselves first, not to pay attention to things that will not help them acquire power, wealth or influence – things that do not help you in your quest for significance – Christians are encouraged us to serve others.

Can you imagine how surprised the Jew must have been when he was rescued by the Good Samaritan ? I think from then on the Jew stopped treating the Samaritans as his enemies.

In the same way, can you imagine the impact that Christians would have if the gospel that we preach is accompanied by genuine and sincere acts of service to people around us ?

So this is the second reason why we serve. Because we are serious about creating an impact for God.

Today, if you cannot bring yourself to serve, the other question you need to ask yourself is this – how serious am I about sharing Jesus Christ ?

### **How Should I Serve ?**

I have given two reasons why Christians should serve. Before I move on to practical ways we can serve – how do I serve – I want to deal briefly with the inner conviction of a servant – how should I serve ?

This issue is important because some Christians serve out of their human effort or because of feelings of guilt. They might think that “if I don't serve hard enough I will not go to heaven”. Because such Christians rely on their human effort, they suffer burnout.

Some other Christians serve out of a need for approval from men.

Some require approval because of a poor self-image. Serving helps them to feel useful or wanted. However, once they stop, or if their service is rejected for some reason or other, they feel unwanted and go into depression.

Others require approval because they want to receive respect or authority. Therefore, they are not willing to “serve” in areas which are not prominent – where they will not be noticed or praised by others.

The first thing I want to emphasise about service is that it is motivated by our love and gratefulness to God. As I have shared earlier, we serve others because even the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, served us. Just like the first disciples, it is this sense of gratefulness – not guilt or a need to for man’s approval – that motivates us to sacrifice our time, effort and resources for others.

The second point is that we serve because we are confident of our standing in God’s eyes. In Mark 10 : 45, we see this confidence in Jesus when He, without any arrogance or false modesty, refers to Himself as the “Son of Man”, the promised Messiah of God. Jesus had a healthy self-image and served out of the strength that comes from knowing where he stood in God’s eyes – accepted and loved for who He is.

Therefore, Jesus had no problems serving the poor, the prostitutes and other outcasts of society. He had no issues with doing dirty work or work which people would consider low class or humiliating. He had no issues with doing work that nobody would notice. He also did not take rejection so badly that he went into depression.

Just as the first disciples served out of a sense of gratefulness for God’s love in their lives, and just as Jesus served out of a confidence of His standing before God, it should be the same with us.

However, I want to be frank and say that this sense of gratefulness, and this confidence of our standing before God, is not something that happens just because you are a Christian. This gratefulness and confidence must be cultivated by spending time reading God’s word and in prayer. The lives of Jesus and the early disciples were characterised by a close and intimate walk with God. In the same way, the depth and breadth of our relationship with God will determine our capacity and effectiveness as servants. To be an effective servant, therefore, you cannot neglect your relationship with God.

### **Where Shall I serve ?**

At home – serve your parents or your spouse. It may be your mother who usually clears the table, or it may be your husband / wife’s turn to do the laundry. Why not do it for them for a change ? How about serving the maid ? Instead of relying on your maid to do the housework all the time, why not help her with some tasks when you notice she is busy ?

At work – it is common for people to guard their territory or to reserve the best – whether it means easiest or most prestigious – jobs for themselves. Why not reverse the culture ? Instead

of positioning yourself to get the easiest job, why not do your share of the difficult or unpleasant work ? Instead of reserving all the prestigious projects to yourself, or keeping all the “tips and tricks” of the job to yourself, why not share the workload and “tips and tricks” with your colleagues, so that the credit is shared by all ?

In church – consider how your gifts or talents might be used to benefit the church. Even if there is no “prominent” ministry opportunity – such as leading worship or leading a fellowship – at the moment, is there is a need for someone to arrange chairs or prepare refreshments ?

In your community – don't ignore a person collecting flag the next time you see him. Participate in church-initiated community activities. Think of what you can do to bless a friend or neighbour.

There was a period of time, when I was doing my national service, that I was appointed the platoon I/C. One of my duties was to update an attendance record book. And in that book, every day, the platoon I/C had to write down a “thought of the day”, which is basically some inspirational quote like “the more you sweat in peace, the less blood you shed in war”.

At that time, I had just read Mark 10, and was inspired to write that “leadership is a service”. When I picked up the book the next morning, my platoon commander had scribbled there “don't talk cock”.

This incident impressed upon me the fact that this idea of serving others without seeking personal gain is something quite foreign to most people. However, in today's passage, we learn that the mark of those who belong to the kingdom of God is the rejection of power in favour of serving others.

*A Servant's Heart*

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The mark of those who belong to the Kingdom of God  
is a rejection of power in favour of serving others

Do I understand the significance of how Jesus served  
me by His sacrifice on the cross ?

How has that made a difference in my life ?

As I close today, I want us to examine ourselves again and whether we bear this mark of Christ in lives. Do I understand the what it means when the Bible says that Jesus served me by His sacrifice on the cross ? And how has that made a difference in the way I lead my life ?