

Building a Christian Community

Serve One Another

Galatians 5:13, John 13:1-20

Introduction

Last week we began a series of messages on Building a Christian Community. We talked about how the church is not a building; it's a body of related believers. We also talked about how we must affirm and develop our spiritual gifts and learn to share them with one another so the body of Christ can function in unity. Just as the physical body comprises individual organs that work together as one, the church, as the spiritual body of Christ, is comprised of individual members that must learn to work together as one to accomplish the purposes of Christ. The church, as the body of Christ, is alive because we are connected to the living Christ.

In Romans Chapter 12, Paul focuses on living your life in the context of a relationship with God. He calls it a "transformed" life, a life lived according to God's purpose. Within the community of believers learning to follow Christ, we each have gifts and abilities to use to serve one another. Jesus sums all this up in John 13 when He says, "love one another as I have loved you." (John 13:34)

Today we're going to look at Galatians 5:13 and then John 13 to gain an understanding of just what Jesus means when he says, "serve one another" and then "love one another." I think what we'll find is that the distinguishing quality of this kind of love is expressed in what we call "Servanthood."

Galatians 5:13 says, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Galatians 5:13)

I. Discover Servanthood

So What is Servanthood? Well, probably the best teaching on the subject comes from the Master Himself. John Chapter 13 captures Jesus teaching about servanthood.

Verse 1 says, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded." (John 13:1-5)

In this passage, you realize that Jesus' focus is entirely different from that of the disciples. Jesus knew he was coming to the end of his earthly ministry. In just a

couple of hours, He would be at Gethsemane. Once again, in the garden, the destiny of humanity is being determined. Jesus faces tremendous dread and anxiety over what lies ahead for Him. The agony is so great that His sweat became like drops of blood. It wasn't just the Roman crucifixion, which is a fearful enough prospect. It was the knowledge that He would soon face the fracturing of the love relationship he always had with God the Father. He knew that he would have to identify and take upon himself all of the evil of humanity. As our substitute, Jesus was going to experience the righteous anger of God against that evil. We find him in the garden begging to be let off and spared this horrible fate, but then relenting for our sakes.

That is the immense, pressing burden on his mind as Jesus comes to this last supper with the disciples. Luke 22:15 tells us he had been looking forward to this meal as a kind of final shelter from the coming storm. He saw it as one last chance for some comfort and fellowship from these twelve disciples who hadn't turned against him yet.

But think about the state of mind of the disciples. They are sitting at the table waiting for the meal, and they've all got dirty feet. But consider this. First, most people wore sandals in those days and second, the dirt roads and streets stirred up a lot of dust. In the culture of the time, the owner of the house would have a servant wash the feet of the guests before they came to the table for a meal.

But Jesus and the disciples were borrowing this room. In that situation, it was common for one of the guests to wash the feet of the others. The question for the disciples was, "Who is going to take the lowly role and wash feet?" The parallel account in Luke 22:24 tells us their discussion led to an argument over which one of them was the greatest! It was a discussion that surfaced quite often. They just couldn't resist jockeying for the highest position in Christ's kingdom. There they sat at the table with dirty feet because not one of them wanted to lose face and serve the others, all the while, arguing over who is the greatest disciple!

They're not unlike so many disciples today! No one wants to serve. We all expect someone else to do it and wonder why people don't treat us right and give us the respect we deserve. The result is that no one's needs are met.

What an unpleasant dinner party when you realize that you're reclining at the table right next to the other guy's dirty feet! Pretty unappetizing! By contrast, Jesus is trying to garner enough courage to go to the cross for these very guys.

While the disciples are fixated on themselves, wondering, "Am I getting the respect I deserve or is the other guy trying to outmaneuver me and get what I want?" Jesus is preparing to give his life for them, and all they can think about is how to push the other guy out so they can get to the top of the list.

Jesus surrenders his expectations of encouragement and fellowship and once again takes up the role of the teacher. He takes the clothing of the slave and begins to wash their feet. They are stunned and very uncomfortable.

When Jesus gets to Peter, Peter refuses. John 13:6 says, "Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." (John 13:6-8)

Jesus is the one person they all thought should NOT do the job. But Peter's pride, knowing he didn't deserve this, refuses to accept it! Why this strong response from Christ? Well, as usual, Jesus accomplishes several things at once. Clearly, there is the picture of the forgiveness Christ will provide for all of us by washing away our sins. But Christ is also saying that the one requirement that enables us to receive His forgiveness is for us to set aside our pride and consent to be served by him!

I wonder, have you ever felt this way when God tries to extend to you His grace! Have you ever let your pride get in the way of receiving God's forgiveness and healing for your life? Does simplicity or humility make you feel uncomfortable? Would you rather earn God's love and forgiveness with some set of good works that justify you? That kind of reaction is our pride at work.

Setting aside your pride is the one requirement for God's acceptance. Salvation requires the humility to let Christ serve us by washing away the moral debt we owe God in a way we don't deserve! Peter demonstrates a true heart of faith because he responds, "Give me a bath!"

In verse 12, Jesus really defines servanthood for us, "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his Master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:12-17)

Jesus points to this demonstration of love and says, "This is your example of authentic servanthood." It explains what He means at the end of the chapter when he says, "love one another as I have loved you." Instead of reacting to the circumstances, Jesus demonstrates a commitment that meets the needs of people. He washes their feet, removing the obstacle preventing them from relaxing and enjoying the meal together.

Jesus also sets aside his own needs for the sake of furthering God's purposes in their lives! That is the picture of servanthood Christ illustrates for us.

II. Pursue Servanthood

Ok, that's Jesus, so why do we need to pursue Servanthood? Good question; Jesus addresses it with a two-part answer in this passage.

First, serving is true fulfillment. Verse 17 contains the first reason. Blessed means fulfilled. The Discovery Bible says that being *blessed* is God literally extending Himself and His benefits, conferring what He deems *eternally valuable*. There is a connection between exercising serving love and our happiness, fullness, and fulfillment in Christ. This is a very practical and critical point to grasp.

When we're feeling empty and unhappy, we often think that we need people to serve us. But consider the way relationships actually work. In our text, what kind of impact does selfishness really have? The Disciples are a perfect picture of it! They're having a miserable time. No one is meeting needs, and everyone is waiting for someone else to do the serving. That leads to the arguing and grumbling between them.

Blessed fulfillment is a result of living a life of serving love. That is what makes relationships work! We were designed to live in a community of relationships based on serving love. Jesus suggests that we will have a blessed life without getting anything back from others if we learn to serve in love. Christ makes the promise that if you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them.

The second reason Jesus gives may be a bit of a surprise, considering the mindset of the disciples at the time! Jesus teaches that servanthood IS true greatness! Verses 12-16 make this point. Jesus is saying, "Since I'm the teacher, you should be able to deduce from my example the effectiveness of servanthood and true greatness. He argues this even more fully in Mark Chapter 9 when He says, "**If any man desire to be first, *the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.***"

In Mark 10:42, He says, "**You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**" (Mark 10:42-45)

Jesus says that servanthood is true greatness, basically because God himself is this way! God, who is the most incredible being by whatever standard of measurement you wish to use, comes to us as a servant. He personally invites us to join Him in a relationship of love and service. Jesus makes this possible for us at the cost of his own son's suffering. He is not a tyrant, grabbing for himself! Jesus calls us to pursue the real thing - Not getting – but giving! That translates to living a life that honors God.

Jesus wants you to put your life and energy into something that will be honored for all eternity! Pursuing servanthood leads us into a life of fulfillment and fellowship with God and with one another. We were created to have a purpose greater than ourselves.

III. Demonstrate Servanthood

But Christ also wants us to become effective in modeling and teaching others servanthood. Christ models some practical points here, which is part of what he means when he says, "love one another as I have loved you."

There are some key differences between servanthood for Christ and other types of service. Servanthood requires a dependence on God vs. philanthropy, which is giving out of your own resources.

Verse 3 is awesome. It says Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, and He knew that He had come from God and was going to God. Then He models servanthood by washing their feet.

As Jesus enters into this situation, what is His focus? On his own relationship with the Father! He's modeling a focus of dependence on God that we can apply directly. It really becomes practical to love this way. Which is what Agape love is!

But it also involves denying yourself vs. self-protection or selfishness! The standout quality of Christ's example is his willingness to set aside his own needs, not acting out on what he felt like doing at the moment, but instead denying himself in favor of God's purpose to the benefit and blessing of others. The truth here seems obvious, but it needs to be underscored because we're up against a culture in which individualism and self-protection are held as the highest ideal.

God is calling us to deny self-protection and pursue a level of servanthood that involves self-denial! Of course, we have legitimate needs. But God knows better than anyone else how to meet those needs.

Even God stresses the need for relaxation and enjoyment, but if the controlling principle in our lives is to protect ourselves and make everyone else our servant, the outcome will be a dry, lifeless, and fruitless kind of life!

Conclusion

So what about you? Are you self-protecting, or are you serving? If you're wondering where to get started developing this area of servanthood in your life, let me make a practical suggestion. Why not find a couple of other people who want to grow and become better disciples and pick a day and time to get together and learn the bible. As you go to each meeting, challenge each other to take advantage of the opportunity to serve others and become better equipped as a follower of Christ. Hold yourself accountable get involved with experienced members of the group who can challenge you to be effective in your service!

Servanthood is based on having a personal relationship with God through Christ. Before we can become God's servants, we must meet and accept Jesus. God wants you to experience complete forgiveness and the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Experiencing God's love and forgiveness is what makes it possible for us to learn how to serve one another.

Let's pray.