



SERIES: "THIS IS THE WAY"

I WILL SERVE • MATTHEW 20:20-28; PHILIPPIANS 2:1-18 •

1.30.22

MAIN POINT

We find the joy of Christ when we serve one another.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When it comes to opportunities for service in the church, are you more apt to say “Yes, I will” or “No, I won’t”? Why?

What is the dirtiest job you have ever done? Are you willing to do it again? Why or why not?

Describe a time when someone served you in a profound way, doing something for you that you absolutely did not want to do. How did that make you feel?

We live in a culture that constantly encourages us to “look out for No. 1,” to put ourselves first, and to do whatever it takes to get ahead. We value the idea of the self-made person. We like to think that we are self-sufficient, that we don’t need the service of others. If we are honest before God, however, none of us got to where we are solely on our own effort. There have been countless people around us who took on lesser roles to serve us, and our lives were never the same. Throughout His ministry and in His death, Jesus showed us what it means to serve others, and today the love of Christ calls us to serve each other as He has served us.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ MATTHEW 20:20-28.

Do you think James and John (the sons of Zebedee) knew their mom was going to ask Jesus this question? Do you think they put her up to it? Why or why not?

What kinds of things might have been on their mind that led them to make this request for greatness?

What was the reaction of the other ten disciples when they heard about this request? What does this reaction suggest about what was in their hearts?

The other disciples weren’t mad because the request was wrong; they were mad because they were afraid James and John had secured a place on which they were going to miss out.

How was “greatness” most commonly demonstrated or pursued in Jesus’ culture?

How is “greatness” defined in our culture today? What does Jesus say about true greatness?

Dr. Rainer explained Jesus’ response in this modern way: “Hey church members: I know that the world says put yourself first. Look after number one. But that’s not the way you are supposed to do it. Stop complaining about the music style and what you want. Stop demanding church leaders to do things the way you would like them to be. Stop trying to get your way in church business meetings. Instead, put others first. Put your desires last. Become a servant instead of a whiner and complainer.” Jesus offered Himself as an example of this.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4.

Why would unity and love among the church complete Paul’s joy, as he noted in verse 2? What would that kind of unity and love look like?

What does it mean to consider someone “better than yourself” (v. 3)?

Is it possible for you to do nothing from vain ambition or conceit? Why is it so hard for most of us to look out for the interests of others?

Dr. Rainer wrote, “We church members must cease and desist becoming ‘I want’ members and become ‘I will’ members.” As a way of promoting unity in our churches, we must willingly demonstrate an unselfish attitude toward others. Any concern that one believer in Philippi had was to become a concern of the whole church. Paul’s affirmation in this verse represents the epitome of unselfishness, and it sets the stage for the remainder of this passage. We are to give priority to unity as believers. We demonstrate this priority by our behavior and by the biblical principles we use as our guides.

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:5-18.

What would it mean for you to have the attitude of Christ?

Though culture often views humility as a weakness, in what ways did Jesus' humility convey and require strength?

Why is selfishness so harmful to the church and its witness to the world?

For what reason did the Father exalt the Son, according to these verses?

How could Philippians 2:5-18 relate to service in the church today?

Paul pointed to Christ's love for others and His obedient service to God as examples for His Philippian friends. Christians who follow Christ's example and exhibit self-sacrificial love toward other believers and willing obedience to God help promote the church's unity. We are to live with an attitude of humility as we relate to others. With a healthy, balanced view of ourselves, we neither think too highly nor too little of ourselves. With this wholesome attitude, we can serve others effectively.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Dr. Rainer suggested a 90-day test, where we ask nothing from the church or complain in any way, but commit two hours a week to serve someone else instead. How do you think this would stretch you? Will you do it?

What are some ways we can better serve together as a group? What are some needs we might look to meet?

How might you remind yourself daily of the character of Christ this week?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for His humility and willingness to serve. Invite Him to show you how you might reflect His character better this week as you look to set aside “I want” for “I will.”

COMMENTARY

MATTHEW 20:20-28

James and John were the sons of Zebedee (4:21). Their mother was not likely to be acting on her own here. Perhaps James and John were guilty of maneuvering for status and rank within the kingdom of heaven. The mother respectfully bowed down to Jesus, preparing to make a formal request. The person on a king’s right hand was his second in command, and the one to his left was third. The woman and the two disciples were assuming that greatness in God’s kingdom was based on status, rank, power, and authority. They also made the mistake Jesus warned against in 19:30-20:16: they were seeking to influence God’s bestowal of reward.

20:24. Somehow the other ten disciples heard of the Zebedees’ request. They were indignant. There was more than pure anger here; there was wounded pride. If the disciples had learned Jesus’ lessons on humility, there would have been no pride to wound. The ten were apparently sorry only that they had not requested the same

privilege first. Jesus chose this opportunity to teach further on the true values of the kingdom of heaven, especially since all twelve disciples had exposed their prideful hearts.

20:25. Jesus called His students for another session in His classroom. He first showed them that their attitudes were like the Gentiles. “You know” drew on their own experience or common knowledge. In the unbelieving world, it is assumed that power and authority define greatness. The rulers and high officials were examples of worldly greatness. The way they demonstrated their “greatness” was to lord it over others and to exercise authority. Jesus was not criticizing authoritative or hierarchical structure but the “strutting.” Such behavior is born out of insecurity and pride. The person who “bosses” others around is trying to prove to himself that he is as great as he hopes. It is only an illusion, for such a person is actually fearful and weak.

20:26-28. With His words, “Not so with you,” Jesus is implying, “You are sons of the Almighty. What are you doing dabbling in these puny efforts at worldly ‘greatness’ when you could be experiencing true greatness.”

The “great” and “the first” bring to mind Jesus’ previous teachings in 18:2-4; 19:30-20:16. Jesus had compared the humility of a true follower to that of a child; here He compared such humility to that of a servant (diakonos) or a slave (doulos). The possessive pronoun your in both cases is plural, implying that the great believer is servant or slave of all fellow believers. This is equivalent to saying, “The first will be last” (19:30; 20:16), but Jesus’ words here were more graphic. The person who is truly great, by heaven’s definition, is the one who chooses an attitude of submission to others in the family of believers.

All of Jesus’ teaching assumes that true humility is based on a healthy self-image. Only the person who is at peace with his true worth in God’s eyes is able to act toward others without trying to prove his or her worth. Convinced of one’s self-worth, the believer is able to move on in an attempt to demonstrate the worth of others.

Jesus could provide no better model than Himself. Although the Messiah-King came with every right to be served, His purpose was to serve them. He gave up His rights and took on a responsibility He was not obligated to take. This responsibility would extend ultimately to our eternal souls, purchased by the sacrifice of His life as a ransom [a substitute] for many.

That Christ lived in the Philippians' hearts was indeed a great blessing for them. The term comfort from love refers to Christ's love for them. Believers are the eternal recipients of God's tender affection not because they deserve love, but because it is God's nature to love. The participation in the Spirit emphasizes the shared nature of the Christian life. The presence of the Holy Spirit makes possible the proper functioning of the body of Christ. With the expression affection and sympathy, Paul pointed to the mercies the Lord had given the believers at Philippi. The Holy Spirit provided rich fellowship among them (v. 1).

In verse 2 Paul shifted from the spiritual blessings the believers enjoyed together to their responsibility to him. The Philippian believers had a heartfelt concern for Paul. He planted the church at Philippi. They watched as he invested his life in their lives. Now he called them to continue what they started.

In contrast to his positive instructions, Paul also detailed for the Philippians what attitudes to avoid in pursuing unity. The word nothing (v. 3) emphasized Paul's conviction that rivalry or conceit should not taint any aspect of the church's life. Paul saw schisms in the church as contrary to the testimony of Christ and dishonoring to God's name. The cornerstone of Christian faith is that humans are powerless to save themselves and must trust Christ to provide all that is necessary for salvation. Thus the believer has no basis for arrogance toward others. Furthermore, arrogance strikes at the heart of Christian unity, spoiling the testimony of the faithful.

To avoid such a destructive mind-set, Paul directed the believers to consider fellow Christians and their needs as more important than their own interests and concerns (v. 4). The church's antidote for selfishness and divisions is an abiding concern for the welfare of others. Paul called the believers to take careful note of the concerns others hold. Such willing consideration of others erases the gaps between individuals and builds a strong unity.

The apostle then gave the Philippians a vivid illustration of the perspective he intended them to have. He showed them Christ. Verses 5 through 8 paint a poignant picture of the humility Christ revealed in His incarnation and His substitutionary death. Paul urged them to exchange their selfish motives for the Savior's attitude.

While Christ has all cause for glorying, being God Himself, He willingly surrendered Himself for the needs of others. The Son of God did not seek His own advantage, that is, He refused to ignore others' needs. The Savior set aside His glory to minister grace and mercy to those who are most undeserving of such blessings. The focus of the Son was to please the Father, and in doing so He sacrificed Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross.

The humility and obedience we see in Jesus Christ is to be a factor on our own lives. How are we to show obedience? The command is to work out your own salvation. When we work out our salvation, we are taking the salvation God's given us and strengthening it through spiritual growth.

In 2:12 Paul continued his practical exhortation on how the Philippians were to live—whether in his presence or in his absence. Paul had just shown the depth of Jesus' obedience (2:5-11), and it is that same level of obedience that believers are to exhibit. Obedience to Christ is the primary responsibility of the church, and it is a critical component of the Christian life. The humility and obedience we see in Jesus Christ is to be a factor on our own lives. How are we to show obedience? The command is to work out your own salvation. When we work out our salvation, we are taking the salvation God's given us and strengthening it through spiritual growth.

Paul called the Philippians to do everything—all aspects of working out their own salvation—without grumbling and arguing (v. 14). When we are working for God's purpose and His glory, it's difficult to be self-centered. Yet self-centeredness and pride enter into our spiritual progress leading us away from unity with God.

When we live as Paul described, we are seen as blameless and pure (v. 15). Our lives are to be pure—unadulterated with the things of the world. Our lives are to be of such purity that no one can blame us or find fault with anything in our lives. We already are children of God, but we are to live like children of God. The faultlessness of believers is contrasted with the world of non-believers, which is characterized by Paul as a crooked and perverted generation. This generation is crooked in that it has turned away from the truth. Perverted is an even stronger word and carries the idea that it has twisted and distorted the truth. The contrast is so sharp between the two groups that it can be compared to the difference between light and darkness. In the midst of the moral darkness around us, we shine like stars in the world. Even with our imperfections, we still serve as a light to a world in darkness. We shine—we are seen—and we point to Christ.

Christians always ought to live in such a way as to present a vivid contrast to the world in which they live (v. 16). The word translated hold firmly indicates that Paul desired his readers to be beacons of truth to those pagans among whom they lived. By their lives, the Philippians were to demonstrate that they were holding fast to the gospel.

Paul's words in verse 17 indicate that he was aware of the very real possibility that he would suffer martyrdom for the cause of Christ. He referred to the possibility of such a death in sacrificial terms. Paul then invited his readers to reciprocate by rejoicing with him in light of his possible martyrdom (v. 18). Rather than being sad at the prospect of his death, Paul urged them to rejoice with him.