

I've got 3 points for us today, and the first one is

1. “Servanthood is Greatness”.

When I was a young fella, if one kid told another one what to do, they'd say, “What did your last slave die of?” And, it wasn't long until there was a witty reply for that: “Disobedience” ...

Not many people aspire to be a slave/servant. But the truth of the matter, is “Servanthood is Greatness”. It has to be, because Jesus (the highest/greatest/powerful/wondrous person to ever live... and more than a person – our God) came as a servant. He didn't come to be served, but to serve.

Meanwhile, the natural attitude/disposition for us humans, is:

- to seek greatness for ourselves;
- to seek recognition;
- for our achievements to be recognised and applauded by others;

And servanthood? Well, that's something I might decide to do, so others can know that I'm such a wonderful person...

I think about the world's super-wealthy and narcissistic celebrities and political leaders, who, maybe in the lead-up to Christmas, might dish up some meals at a homeless kitchen for a couple of hours, and the whole world knows about it...

And then they head home to their lavish mansions, to be waited upon, hand and foot...

The natural way of man, is one of self-centredness – self first and if there's any serving to be done, well, it would be nice if somebody was serving me.

And this isn't a new thing.

On the night of Jesus' betrayal, He's just eaten Passover with His Disciples, and He's just told them that one of them is going to betray Him... And of course, they all wondered, "Who is it?" Well, it's not me...

And the very human progression of this self-protecting of innocence, led to a dispute. ²⁴ A dispute ... arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

"I'm more committed to Jesus than you are". "No, no. I am.".... I left my:

- fishing boat;
- tax table;
- family...

To get into an argument over who is the greatest Disciple of Jesus, is pretty-well evidence that **none** of them were very good.

And Jesus called them out on it. "It's like this:" **"The kings of the Gentiles (ungodly) exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you.**

Let me give you a modern-day example.

North Korea is one of the most repressive regimes in the world. And complete power is held by Kim Jong Un. And it is required for young people to refer to Their Supreme Leader as “Respected Father”ⁱ. And the media present him to the people as “Benevolent Father”ⁱⁱ ...

All good things come from him. He is generous to them, to give them food and jobs... And they are so lucky to have him as their leader.

That’s what a “benefactor” is – someone who is admired because others depend on them..

Meanwhile, the people are living in poverty in perhaps the most repressive regime in the world... If one says a bad word about the Supreme Leader, your whole family will suffer.

But it’s not only leaders of nations who seek to be the one being served, and want to be seen as the one who provides for another (benefactor)... It’s not only leaders of nations who crave power and prestige...

It happens:

- In the workplace;
- in the home;
- in the school-yard;
- in the community;
- in sporting clubs;
- in social media;
- in the church;

- And now, there is now a whole new designation of a person, as “an influencer”...

Many crave, to be recognised for their significance.

But Jesus said to His Disciples, ²⁶ **But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.**

And I think back in the church’s dark history, and times when leaders in the church were in it for the power; the money; the prestige.

We visited Tonga a few years ago, and we visited a theological college, and some of the men studying to be ministers there, (to be quite frank), they didn’t come across as being very godly. And so I asked somebody about it, and he said, “Well, you need to understand, that in the hierarchy of a village, the Minister comes just below The Chief. And some folk will think the Minister is more important than the chief.” And that’s why some of those men are here. They want the power/prestige/authority...

And sadly, the culture in some mega-churches, can be quite similar. The Senior Pastor is up on a pedestal, and his staff and congregation are there to serve him.

This is not the way it’s supposed to be. As Christians, we find “greatness” by serving others. That’s what Jesus did. Jesus – the Name Above All Names, and yet He served.

But, what does it mean “to serve” / “to be a servant”?

Well, it's not just to do something nice for someone – it's to step in, and to do for another, what most would consider “the mundane” / “a task that is beneath them” / “something that is just yucky.”

For a husband to be a servant, might mean, you not only change the dirty nappy, but you rinse it out, and you wash it... (hang on, I'm showing my age. You just throw nappies away these days, don't you? Does anybody here still use nappies that need to be washed?)

Or if a stranger is sick, vomits in public building, and you're there, would you step in and clean it up? That's being a servant.

Jesus gave us the perfect example, when He stripped down to His underwear, wrapped a cloth around His waist, and washed filthy feet...

Let the leader become the one who serves. Not just doing the things we don't mind doing – but to lower ourselves – to do for others, what we do not even like doing for ourselves.

Who do you know, in our community, who has no one to look after them? Be a servant. Serve those who are not able to look after themselves.

Possibly, one of the biggest cop-outs for our generation of Christians, is the professionalisation of the church and its services. We want our **church** to provide:

- healthcare for the sick;
- food baskets for the hungry;
- counselling services for the broken;
- home-care services for the aged and infirmed.

And we turn up for church on a Sunday morning and we pat ourselves on the back, “Aren’t we all wonderful servants...”, but we ourselves have done nothing...

Yes, church programs and service initiatives can be wonderful, but we could be in danger of missing the point, of humble, personal serving of others...

If I am not serving, I’m not Christ-like. Are you with me?

We talk about this a lot here: The fruit of the Spirit. And when it comes to personal serving of others, I think of Love; Patience; Kindness; Goodness; Faithfulness; Gentleness... And I even think of “Joy”. What a joyful thing it is, to take the burden of another, and be a servant to them (expecting nothing in return)...

And I’ll tell you what: When we do something like that, **sometimes**, the other person will be reduced to tears, because nobody’s ever done **anything** like that for them before... And they don’t know how to thank you, or repay you, but that’s not why we do it... We do it, because Christ is in our hearts, and serving is what Christ does.

Anyway:

When we selflessly serve, it might seem like there's no reward. But we are **always** rewarded for faithfulness. *I did something for someone the other day, and it was a big job. And it wasn't a nice job. And Robyn said, "Michael, I know what you've done; And God knows what you've done... Your reward will be in heaven."*

And I want **you** to know, every time **you** become a servant to others, God knows, and your reward will be in heaven.

But having said that, we don't earn the heavenly reward. The Heavenly Reward, is for **faithfulness**. Jesus said to His Disciples: ²⁸ **"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, And I'll tell you what: My Father's given me a Kingdom, and you're going to share in it.**

- "You've been faithful to me. You get to share in my reward."
- You will be in my Kingdom.
- You will eat from my table.
- You will share in the authority that I have.

We don't become great by lording it over others. We become great, by serving faithfully.

Let's move on. Second point:

2. We fail, but He restores.

Still at this same meal (The Last Supper), Jesus broke Peter's heart when He said, "Peter, you're going to deny me 3 times."

But there's more to the story than that. Jesus said: ³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

And I don't think I've ever noticed this before, but in the original Greek, the first "you", is plural. So, it reads like this:

³¹ "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you[s] (you lot/disciples), that he might sift you[s] like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you (Simon Peter) that your faith may not fail. And when you (Simon Peter) have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

What an amazing thing. They were all in danger. Jesus prayed for the one who fell – that when he was restored, he would strengthen the others.

And we know the story: Simon Peter was full of bravado – "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."

But that's not how the story went. Before the rooster crowed, during the night, Peter denied Jesus 3 times.

Now, what was going on here? It was a spiritual attack. Satan demanded to have the Disciples. I think that means, Satan wanted them to fall from the faith. And we talk about Satanic attacks sometimes, when everything seems to be going

wrong... Do you know what Satan really wants when he attacks? He wants you, to stop following Jesus. He wants you to give up on your faith. And that way, you'll be in Hell with him.

But here's the amazing thing. The one who was the weakest, was Simon Peter. He's the one who denied Jesus. But Jesus had prayed for Simon Peter – that his faith would not fail.

And when you (Simon Peter) have turned again (when you turn back to me), strengthen your brothers."

And a short while after the resurrection, Simon Peter became the backbone of those disciples. No longer was he the one cowering. He boldly lead the early church, and boldly proclaimed the good news of Jesus.

You think of that, next time you fail... We fail, but God restores.

There's times when I have failed. But the wonder of God, is the way He takes our failures, and He transforms us, and makes us newer and stronger. And God does a new thing through us.

There may be a weakness/sin in your life – something that's causing you to fail – something that's holding you back in your walk with God...

Pray with me: "Jesus, pray for me."

- Don't let my faith fail;
- Forgive me, Lord;

- Strengthen me, that I can turn away from this path, that is a path of destruction;
- Protect me from The Evil One; and
- Restore me.

Lord, I have failed. Please restore me, and by this restoration, use even me to strengthen my brothers and sisters in Christ....

And the third point.

3. Mission is going to get tough.

Back in Chapter 10, was the earlier days of Jesus' ministry. They were happier times. Things were easier. And Jesus sent 72 of His disciples (not only 12) out on a mission trip. And He said, "Carry no moneybag; Don't take a knapsack; or a change of footwear... What you need will be provided for you."...

And now, Jesus reminds them of these early happy times, and He says, **"When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?"**

No. We had everything we needed...

But things are about to change. Now:

- if you have a moneybag, take it.
In other words, you might find, that you have to use your own resources to meet your needs while you're preaching

the Gospel.

- Take a knapsack too.
You might not be welcomed...

And then He said something astounding: **And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one.**

Do you all have your swords with you today? What's wrong with you? Are you not Bible-believing Christians???

How does this fit our picture of being a Christian???? “If you haven't got a sword, sell something and buy one”.... That would be like Jesus saying to us today, “And if you don't have a firearms, sell something you don't need, and go and buy one”... Does that sit right with you???

As you probably know by now, I'm an active member in the St George Pistol Club. And only a few days ago, I had somebody say to me, something which is quite common: “Being a keen pistol shooter doesn't really fit my picture of a pastor” ...

I get that all the time. And some people can't handle the fact that Jesus allowed His disciples to carry swords. At least 2 of the 12 carried swords. They had them there at the Passover meal. And one of them we know, was Simon Peter. He's the one who, when Jesus was arrested (later that night), drew his sword, and chopped off the ear of the servant of the High Priest...

Why would they carry swords? I'm not sure. Certainly as a deterrent to thieves on the road.

But, in the context of what Jesus is saying, I think we're getting an image of self-protection. But I can tell you what they were **not** to be used for: For opposing God's will, or God's appointed authorities.

When Peter drew his sword that night, and chopped the ear off, Jesus said: 2 things.

1. All who take the sword, shall perish with the sword.
The way of Jesus, is not to fight and kill. That's not what His Kingdom is about; and
2. Don't you think that my Heavenly Father and His legions of angels would protect me, if that's what I asked for???

You see, God had a purpose. And the suffering and death of Jesus, was in that purpose. And Jesus has already told us, that as His Disciples, **we** may be betrayed unto death. This also, is God's purpose...

The Scriptures are very clear. As Christians, we do not bring the Kingdom of God in, through violence.

And that comes out here: The Disciples said, "Look Lord, we've got 2 swords"... And Jesus said, "It is enough"... He wasn't creating an army.

He was making a point: That **Scripture** would be fulfilled:
'**And he was numbered with the transgressors.**'

Jesus was seen as “Public enemy No.1”. And He was executed between 2 criminals. **he was numbered with the transgressors.**

Jesus' whole point, is that being a Disciple of Jesus, is going to get tough. If **Jesus** is seen as “Public Enemy No.1”, don't be surprised when you are. And it will be especially hard, for those who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus...

The world doesn't want to hear the Gospel. And in some places, Christians are “Public Enemy No.1”.

Even in Australia, some people hate Christians. Does that mean we take the sword to them? Of course not.

The simple message is, “When we meet opposition, don't be surprised. Jesus has already told us, that it's going to be tough.

So:

1. “Servanthood is Greatness”.

Swinging a sword doesn't bring greatness. Humbling ourselves, and serving others, in the most lowly way... That's Christ-likeness.

2. We fail, but He restores.

When we fail, may the Lord lead us to repentance, and restore us when we fail. And may He then use us, to strengthen others.

3. Mission is going to get tough.

Faithfulness is what's rewarded – not productivity. Hold on to the faith; Serve our Lord, with every resource you have.

And to God be the Glory.

Questions???

ⁱ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/father-05152023163247.html>

ⁱⁱ https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2025/01/103_388966.html