

## ***BECOMING A GREAT SERVANT***

**Mark 9:30-37**

**By Andy Manning**

- The title of this sermon is “Becoming a Great Servant.”
- If you are a Christian, then I know something about you. You want to be a great Christian. You want to be the best Christian that you can possibly be.
  - The reason I know that is because the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, giving you that desire.
  - No Christian wants to be a mediocre Christian, or a casual Christian, or an average Christian. A true Christian loves Jesus wants to be a great Christian – the best Christian that they can be.
- But how do you become a great Christian?
- How do you need to live your life so when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ He will say to you, “Well done, my good and faithful servant”? How can you be the best Christian that you can be?
- I think we can find the answer in **Mark 9:30-37**.

30 Then they left that place and made their way through Galilee, but He did not want anyone to know it. 31 For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him, and after He is killed, He will rise three days later.” 32 But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him.

- At this point in Jesus’ life, He has been ministering for about three years, mostly in the region of Galilee (Northern Israel), and very soon He is going to go Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world.

- In fact, in chapter 10, Jesus is going to move south to the region of Judea, and then in chapter 11 He is going to enter the city of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.
- And this is Jesus' second passion prediction. This is the second time in Mark that Jesus has predicted His suffering, death, and resurrection.
- But it says that the disciples still didn't understand. They wouldn't get it until Jesus explained everything after His resurrection.

33 Then they came to Capernaum. When He was in the house, He asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" 34 But they were silent, because on the way they had been arguing with one another about who was the greatest.

- Apparently as they were walking the disciples had fallen back behind Jesus and had an argument.
  - And they thought that Jesus couldn't hear them, but being God, He did hear them.
  - And He confronted them about it.
  - Why were they silent? Because they knew that He wouldn't be pleased with their topic of discussion.
  - They were arguing about who was the greatest among them.
  - Who was the greatest disciple?
- There's a problem with this picture.
  - They are asking the wrong question.

- We shouldn't be striving to be a greater Christian than others; we should strive to be great Christians. The best we can be.
- If they were going to argue about anything, it should have been this: How to be the greatest Christian you can be.
- The goal of Christianity is not to be a better Christian than others, but to please God.
- And we don't please God by being better than others.
- When God looks at you, He doesn't compare you to the people around you; He compares you to Jesus Christ.
- It doesn't matter if you are a better Christian than the people around you. Are you like Jesus? That's what matters.
- And so Jesus is going to change the topic.
  - Instead of focusing on who is the greatest, Jesus focuses their attention on the meaning of greatness.
  - He focuses their attention on how to be a great Christian. How to be great in God's eyes. How to be the very best Christian that you can be.

35 Sitting down, He called the Twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

- Jesus said if you want to be great in God's eyes, if you want to be the best Christian that you can be, if you want to please God with your life, then be a servant.
  - In other words, **to be great in God's eyes, become a great servant.** To be a great Christian, the best you can be, become a great servant.

- So with the remainder of our time, I want us to think about how to become better servants. Let's look at several statements about servanthood that will move us in the right direction.

### **3 Statements about Servanthood**

#### **1. Servanthood is about meeting needs.**

- Let's get a definition of servanthood, or of what Jesus means by "being last of all and servant of all."
- **To serve is to identify and meet the legitimate needs of your people.**
- Servanthood is about meeting needs. Not wants. Needs.
  - A **want** is a wish or desire without any regard for the physical or spiritual consequences.
  - A **need** is a legitimate physical or spiritual requirement for the well-being of the person. Serving others is about meeting their needs, not their wants.
- This is the difference between a servant and a slave.
  - A slave does what people want them to do. A servant is different.
  - A servant meets people's needs.
- Servanthood doesn't mean that you always say Yes when people ask you for something.
  - Sometimes people ask for things that are not good for them, which means that sometimes servanthood means saying No.

- Servanthood is not about being a people-pleaser.
  - It's not about making people happy; it's about identifying and meeting their legitimate needs.
  - Sometimes serving others will actually make them angry, because they don't want what they need.
- For example, a doctor's job is to serve his patients, and that means identifying and meeting their medical needs.
  - Sometimes that means telling people what they don't want to hear – you need to lose weight, and exercise, and stop smoking and drinking.
  - Sometimes that means telling people No. “No, I'm not going to write you another prescription for those pain killers.”
- Sometimes what people most need is to develop self-reliance.
  - This is something parents try to teach their kids.
  - My kids often ask me for help with things like shoe-tying and I will say, “No. I'm not going to help you with that. I want you to do it on your own. I want you to figure it out. If I always step in a help you then you will never develop the skills and strength to take care of yourself.”
- And sometimes what people most need is to learn from their mistakes, and that means they need to suffer the consequences of their actions.
  - This is also important for parents.
  - When a child is disrespectful or disobedient, what they want is for you to overlook it. But what they need is to suffer the consequences and get a spanking. Otherwise they will never grow.

- So serving is not the same as giving people what they want, or pleasing people.
- So in your life, God has called you to be a servant – identifying and meeting the legitimate needs of your people.
- What do I mean by “your people?”
  - Your people are the people in your life.
  - You can’t serve everyone in the world, because you only have so many resources, and you will never meet most of the people in the world.
  - So serving begins with “your people;” the people in your life; the people closest to you.
  - Start with the people who live in your house. Your immediate family. Your Home Group. Your neighbors. Your classmates. Your teammates. Your coworkers. The people you see at the gym. Your customers.
  - “Your people” are people you rub shoulders with; the people you spend the most time with; the people you see the most often.
  - God has called you to serve them – to identify and meet their legitimate needs.
- Now how do you identify people’s needs?
  - Well, one thing you can do is to think of a need as an obstacle.
  - If you are manager, then your job is to serve the people under your authority by removing the obstacles that are preventing them from doing their job with excellence.
  - If you are a teacher, then your job is to serve your students by removing the obstacles that are getting in the way of learning.

- If you are a parent, then your job is to serve your kids by removing the obstacles that are preventing them from becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus.
- If you are the President of the United States, or the governor of Louisiana, then your job is to serve your citizens by removing the obstacles that threaten their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – like high taxes and tons of government regulations that make it hard to start and run a small business.
- Let's go to the second statement about servanthood.

## **2. Servanthood is the essence of Christlike character.**

- This is important to bring up because I want you to feel the weight of what we are talking about.
- Servanthood is no minor thing.
- In Christianity, it is the thing – it is perhaps the defining quality of Jesus Christ, and the defining quality of Christian character.
- As Christians, we are called to imitate Christ by loving God and others more and more.
- So what is Christ like? He is a servant.
- **Mark 10:45** says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life—a ransom for many.”
- Jesus didn't come to be served. He didn't come to be waited on hand and foot. He came to serve, and He displayed the ultimate act of service when He died on the cross for our sins.

- **Philippians 2:5-8** says, “5 Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus, 6 who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage. 7 Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave, taking on the likeness of men. And when He had come as a man in His external form, 8 He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—even to death on a cross.”
- Jesus was God in human flesh, but He didn’t use His divinity to serve Himself. He didn’t use His divine powers to live in fine palaces, and be waited on all the time, and be escorted around in a golden chariot, and to be served the finest of foods, and to wear the nicest clothes.
- He used His divine powers to serve others. He healed the sick, and drove out demons, and preached, and died for our sins.
- Bible scholar **J. Hampton Keathley, III** wrote that servanthood is "that quality which so completely characterized the life of Jesus Christ, the quality of unselfish servanthood."
- Commentator **James Edwards** wrote, “Service to others is the primary way in which believers imitate and fulfill the mission of Jesus.”
- Writer **John Ortberg** wrote, “Serving in self-giving love is the most Godlike thing a human being can do.”
- As a Christian our goal is to become like Christ. And the best way to do that is to become a better servant.

Let’s look at a third statement.

### **3. Servanthood is for everyone.**

- This statement means two things.

**First of all, Jesus calls everyone to servanthood.**

- When Jesus told His disciples that in order to be great in God's eyes they had to become great servants like Him, He was making it clear that servanthood is for everyone.
- Servanthood has nothing to do with your job title. You can be a servant whether you are a husband or a wife. You can be a servant whether you are a parent or a child. You can be a servant whether you are a student or a teacher, a manager or a subordinate. You can be a servant whether you are rich or poor.
- In other words, you will never get to the point in your life where you are too important to be a servant.
- In fact, Jesus would say that your level of importance and success in life is defined by how well you serve others.
- It doesn't matter if you are the president, the king, the CEO, the world champion, the owner, a billionaire, or a celebrity, if you want to be like Christ and be the best a Christian you can be, then you need to be a great servant.
- So first of all, the statement "servanthood is for everyone" means that Jesus calls everyone to servanthood.

**But second, the statement also means that servanthood serves everyone.**

- When Jesus said to be the servant of all, He didn't mean that you are to serve everyone in the world; He meant that there is nobody too low for you to serve.
- There is nobody who is too unimportant for you to serve. There is nobody too insignificant for you to serve. There is nobody too sinful for you to serve.

- Jesus gave an illustration of this principle in **Mark 9:35-37**. Let's go back and read it again.

35 Sitting down, He called the Twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 Then He took a child, had him stand among them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one little child such as this in My name welcomes Me. And whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me, but Him who sent Me."

- After Jesus calls His disciples to strive for greatness in God's eyes by being servants, He gives them an example.
- He takes a child in His arms and says, "Whoever welcomes, or receives, or serves a little child like this," serves me.
- What did Jesus mean? Children back then were not highly valued as they are today. They were like second-class citizens. They were unimportant and insignificant. They were burdens that just got in the way.
- And Jesus said that servanthood is the willingness to serve even little children – even the most unimportant in society.
- Again, the point is that servanthood serves everyone. There is nobody too low, too unimportant, too insignificant for you to serve.
- You should serve everyone, regardless of class, income, appearance, education, etc.
- The Bible even tells us to serve our enemies.
- Look at **Romans 12:19-20**. "19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink."

- In other words, not only are we to not get revenge on our enemies, but we are to serve them. We are to identify and meet their needs, too!
- Servanthood is for everyone. No matter how important you think you are, God has called you to be a servant.
- And no matter how unimportant you think other people are, God has called you to serve them.
- Now, let me add this. If God wants us to serve everyone, what about the Christian wedding vendors who refuse to service same-sex weddings?
  - None of these wedding vendors has refused to serve gay people.
  - They have refused to serve gay weddings, because that goes beyond serving to actually participating in their sinful activity.
  - For example, if a gay customer walks in to buy a cake or some other item, there's never been an issue. These Christian bakers serve everyone.
    - But when a gay customer requests a cake for a gay wedding ceremony, which in itself is sinful event, and event that actually celebrates something sinful, then the wedding vendors have refused.
    - They haven't refused to serve; they have refused to participate in something that is sinful.
    - For example, if my neighbor asked me to help her change a flat tire, I should serve her, even if she is gay.
      - But if my neighbor asked me to help her steal somebody's tires, then I would have to decline – not because she is gay,

but because she is asking me to participate in something sinful.

- I'm not refusing to serve; I'm refusing to participate, to join in, or to contribute to a sinful activity.
- But those are rare instances.
- In the majority of cases, everyone is called to serve, and we are called to serve everyone.

### **Conclusion**

- So let's review.
- If you want to be a great Christian, the best Christian that you can be; if you want to be great in God's eyes, then become a great servant.
- And then we looked at three statements about servanthood.
  - First, servanthood is about meeting needs. Or more specifically, to serve is to identify and meet the legitimate needs of your people.
  - Second, servanthood is the essence of Christlike character. As Christians we are called to imitate Christ. That's our goal. What is Christ like? His most defining quality is servanthood. He came not to be served, but to serve. And that's what should define your life and mine.
  - Third, servanthood is for everyone. In other words, everyone is called to serve, and there is nobody too unimportant or too sinful for you to serve. You are called to be the servant of *all*.