

Improving Your Serve

Mark 10:35-45

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March 25-26, 2017

As a mother was preparing pancakes for her two young sons, Kevin and Ryan, they began to argue over who would get the first one. Not wanting to miss a teachable moment, the mom said: *“If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake.’”* Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, *“OK, Ryan. You be Jesus!”*

I’m making an assumption that while Edgewood is saturated with servants, each of us can ratchet up our servanthood quotient. The trouble is that our default setting is selfishness, not other-centeredness. In order to improve our serve we must seek the Savior and follow the model of the Master.

You and I have been redeemed for a reason. Another way to say it is that we’ve been saved to serve and mobilized for ministry. As we gather and grow, we can’t help but GIVE and go.

4 Ways to Become a Servant

Last week we parked in Mark 10:32-34 where we learned that Jesus fulfilled past prophecies as well as eight future predictions: ***“See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man [1] will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, [2] and they will condemn him to death and [3] deliver him over to the Gentiles. [4] And they will mock him and [5] spit on him, and [6] flog him and [7] kill him. [8] And after three days he will rise.”***

Right after hearing this, check out what two of the disciples do in verse 35: ***“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’”*** It didn’t take them long to move from being *amazed* and *afraid* to having *an attitude of arrogance*. They went from feeling emotional to feeling entitled.

This isn’t the first time the followers of Christ get all caught up in who’s the best or the brightest, the first or the favorite. Right after Jesus made his first prediction of his upcoming suffering, Peter argued with Him. After His second prediction of suffering and sacrifice, the disciples argue among themselves. Jesus calls them out

by asking what they were talking about in 9:34: ***“But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.”***

The disciples never seemed to figure out the importance of selfless servanthood while Jesus was alive. In fact, during the last supper, on the night before His death, unbelievably we read these words in Luke 22:24: ***“A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”***

As we come to our text today, we’ll see that we’re more like those first followers than we care to admit. If we want to live differently than the disciples did, we must incorporate four attitudes and actions.

1. Monitor our motives. In Matthew 20:20-21, we see a fuller picture of what’s going on. Even though they’re called the sons of Zebedee, these men are actually “Mama’s boys.” Functioning like a helicopter parent, their mom appeals to Jesus on their behalf: ***“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.’”***

This mother’s name was Salome, who was likely the aunt of Jesus. Maybe James and John thought she’d be able to pull some family strings for them.

When we go back to Mark’s account, amazingly, these guys ask for a blank check from Jesus: ***“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”*** They want Jesus to say, ‘yes’ even before He hears what they want. They’re treating Jesus like a Genie who will grant them their wishes.

Before we get too hard on them, don’t we often do the same when we are demanding towards Him? Some even use “name it and claim it” language as if just declaring what we want will make it so. Listen. Instead of saying to the Savior, ***“We want you to do whatever we ask of you,”*** we should be praying something like this: ***“We want to do for you whatever YOU ask of us.”***

In verse 36, Jesus asks them to put their request into words in order to reveal their own self-centered selfishness: ***“And He said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’”*** They’re ready with their rehearsed request in verse 37: ***“And they said to Him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’”*** The word ***“grant”*** can be translated as, ***“bestow.”*** One translation puts it

like this: *“Bestow to us at once!”* To sit at the right hand is the highest cabinet position and the seat on the left hand is just below that.

Now, before we get too tough on these guys, Jesus did say in Matthew 19:28: ***“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”*** They got that part right but their methods were messy because their motives were all mixed up. Warren Wiersbe comments, *“Jesus spoke about a cross, but they were interested in a crown.”*

It’s really easy for our motives to get out of whack. James and John wanted proximity, position, power and prominence. They wanted to be the closest to Jesus and they wanted to be higher than anyone else. And their mother desired the best for them. All three of them wanted *their* will done in *their* way and in *their* time.

If we want to improve our serve, we must first learn to monitor our motives. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to have pure motivation? My motives are often misaligned, even when I try to keep them straight. I can remember the few times I helped out with some small construction-related tasks when we went through a building expansion when I was pastoring in Pontiac (and when I say small tasks I mean sweeping the floors or washing windows). I sincerely wanted to lend a hand but I also wanted people to know I was helping. Even my telling you this probably has an element of mixed motives in it. Even though I’m confessing my duplicity, my motive in telling you is probably to make you think better of me than I really am.

As best we can, we need to get our reason for serving straightened out. Let’s not serve to impress others or to try to gain favor with God. The world says, *“actions speak louder than words”* while the Word says, *“motives speak louder than actions and words.”*

I came across a quote this week by Paul Miller that messed with me: *“The great struggle of my life is not trying to discern God’s will; it is trying to discern and disown my own.”*

When faced with their mixed up motives, Jesus asks a question to reveal what they were thinking: ***“What do you want me to do for you?”*** A truthful answer to this same question can help you and I monitor our motives. Here are some related questions to ask when you’re not sure about your motivation: *“What is it I want?”*

*“Why am I doing this?” “Who am I serving here?” “Who do I want to impress?”
“Am I doing this for God’s glory or for my own good?”*

There’s also a lesson here for parents. While this mom no doubt wanted the best for her sons, she was actually exhibiting a spirit of entitlement. Sometimes as parents we can be so focused on the “success” of our children that we can end up creating self-centered sons and daughters who believe they are princes or princesses that deserve the best, the brightest and the biggest. It’s helpful to remember that our kids learn the most through the losses in life. Character is built through stress, not success.

2. Prepare for problems. After they make their bold and brash request, Jesus responds rather bluntly in verse 38: *“You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?”* He’s really saying, *“You don’t have a clue what you’re asking.”*

The word **“cup”** was a symbol of suffering or affliction. To **“drink”** means to take something deep inside. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed in Matthew 26:39: *“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”* The cup stood for God’s wrath and judgment as seen in Isaiah 51:17: *“Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.”*

At its core, baptism means, *“to be identified with by being fully submerged.”* The idea here is that Jesus is about to be fully immersed in intense suffering. This is illustrated in Psalms 69:2: *“I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me.”*

On top of all the physical pain we talked about last weekend, Jesus is about to experience the undiluted wrath of His righteous and holy Father as He takes the sins of the entire world on his shoulders. This doctrine is called “penal substitutionary atonement,” meaning that Christ died on the cross as a substitute for sinners. God imputed the guilt of our sins to Christ, and He, in our place, bore the punishment that we deserve. This was a full payment for sins, which satisfied both the wrath and the righteousness of God, so that He could forgive sinners without compromising His own holy standard.

This doctrine is at the center of Christian faith and practice but in recent days has been attacked on Twitter by Christian musician and Grammy-nominated Michael

Gungor as something “evil” and “horrific” that God would mandate blood sacrifice for sin. Here’s his exact quote: *“That God needed to be appeased with blood is not beautiful. It’s horrific.”*

William Paul Young, the author of *The Shack*, (which has sold 20 million copies and has been made into a movie) in his new book called, *Lies We Believe About God*, says this about the death of Christ: *“Who originated the Cross?...If God did, then we worship a cosmic abuser...Better no god at all, than this one.”*

I don’t have time to develop this further but suffice it say these are vicious attacks on the central truth of Christianity that Jesus died as our substitute. As Owen Strachan writes: *“The atoning work of Christ is not an optional add-on to our doctrine of God.”* Romans 3:25-26: ***“Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness...so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”***

It’s interesting that Jesus uses the two words that we use for the ordinances – the *cup* (communion) and *baptism*. Incidentally, Jesus is not talking about being “sprinkled” with problems but being fully immersed in extreme and excruciating pain. We have a number of people who will be baptized in two weeks and we’ll be celebrating communion next weekend.

Unbelievably, both James and John answer this pointed question with complete confidence in verse 39, ***“We are able.”*** I think they were a bit too eager in their response. Jesus reinforces this when He says: ***“The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized.”*** They wanted glory but Jesus tells them to get ready for some grief and to prepare for some problems.

While we don’t always know in advance how much we’re going to suffer, we do know that if we’re serious about following Christ and serving Him wholeheartedly, we will face difficulty. Philippians 1:29: ***“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.”*** James didn’t suffer long because he lost his life as the first of the twelve to be martyred (Acts 12:2). John lived to be about 95 but his life was filled with difficulty, culminating with his banishment to the island of Patmos. James was executed and John was exiled.

Friend, if you’re serious about serving, then get ready to suffer. You might be taken home early like James or you may battle a long time like John. To ***“drink of***

the cup” has reference not only to suffering, but refers to remaining faithful to the end. This phrase was understood to mean to drain the *entire* cup until it was emptied. While you can’t beat kingdom service, it will not always be easy. If you’re serving in a ministry right now, chances are that you’ve already experienced some difficulty. If you haven’t yet, you will. We’ve done a disservice by promising that the Christian life will be trouble-free and by promoting ministry as simple and a piece of cake. It *will* cost you to serve Christ! Are you willing to pay the price?

In verse 40 Jesus says, ***“But to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”***

3. Elevate others first. After monitoring our motives and preparing for problems, the third way to improve our serve is to elevate others. In case you’re wondering how the other ten felt when they saw that James and John were trying to grab the power positions, look at verse 41: ***“And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.”*** I bet Peter must have really been torqued since he was also part of the inner circle and was considered the spokesman!

The word ***“indignant”*** means, *“to be greatly afflicted and sorely vexed.”* It would be fair to say they are fired up and fried up! They were really mad that these two were using their mommy to get special treatment and they weren’t going to give up the top spots without a fight. They weren’t appalled by their lack of understanding of true servanthood; they were upset that these two got to Jesus first. The spiritual attitude of the ten was not any better than that of the two.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to be angry at the sin we see in others, while we indulge in the same ones ourselves? Why is it that we condemn in others what we excuse in our own lives?

I’m thrilled that around 120 men have signed up for the *Iron Sharpens Iron* conference next Saturday – there’s still time to sign up if you haven’t done so. I’m looking forward to the two main sessions as well as a number of breakout sessions. What man doesn’t need help with finances? How about loving our wives or learning about mentoring? What about growing in sexual integrity? Who doesn’t need some practical ways to connect with our kids?

And guys, let’s admit that many of us have anger issues. Our very own Jason Crosby, station manager at Moody Radio in the Quad Cities (one of our Go Team partners), will be speaking on the topic, *“Anger: Developing a Plan for a Powerful Emotion.”* Jason shared with me something J.D. Grear said about anger. I jumped

on RightNow Media and wrote it down: *“Most of our anger is selfish anger. Someone does something to us and we get back at them. Another kind of anger is loving anger, which brings healing to someone.”* That’s intriguing to me – that means anger can be retaliative or it can be redemptive.

When a spirit of competition and jealousy enters a fellowship, there is always fallout and retaliation. A desire to get ahead leads to others being left behind. Selfishness *always* results in dissension. When we think only of ourselves, community breaks down and unity is replaced with division and backbiting.

I love what Jesus does next in the first part of verse 42: ***“And Jesus called them to him...”*** That’s exactly what needs to happen when there is tension and strife. We need to come to Jesus together. When Jesus calls them to Himself He does so with tenderness and familiarity. I picture Him calling a huddle and saying something like this, *“Guys, gather in. Let’s form a tight circle. Get a little closer so you can hear what I’m about to say.”*

He knows their default systems are set on selfishness and so he calls them *together*. He doesn’t take the two brothers aside and blast away, nor does he slam the ten for being indignant. He simply brings them back to community and then gives them a lesson in how differently things are to run in His kingdom.

There is a sharp contrast between the servanthood philosophy of the Savior and the world system they were swimming in: ***“...You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.”*** The world’s way teaches that we should spend all our energy to get to the top and then when we get there we can boss others around.

When Jesus reminded them that seeking power was a “Gentile” or “pagan” practice, He was in essence telling them they should not operate this way. Rabbis often used Gentile illustrations as negative examples.

The German Kaiser was one of the most recognized figures of WWI. After he died, his valet said this: *“I cannot deny that my master was vain, he had to be the central figure in everything. If we went to a christening he wanted to be the baby, if we went to a wedding he wanted to be the bride, if we went to a funeral he wanted to be the corpse.”* Because he was self-centered, he wanted to be the center of everything...we have similar desires in our own hearts.

Verse 43 begins with a rebuke as Jesus reframes their understanding: ***“But it shall not be so among you...”*** A Christ-follower must not operate this way. The meaning here is: *“It shall not be,”* or *“It must not be.”* In the family of God there is only one category of people: *servants*.

Notice the rest of this verse and verse 44: ***“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.”*** This was a counter-cultural and radical teaching for Jesus to define success in terms of servanthood.

It’s refreshing to see someone famous not be selfish or self-centered, isn’t it? Just this week, *Fortune Magazine* named Theo Epstein, the president of baseball operations for the World Series Champions Chicago Cubs, “the world’s greatest leader.” He came in two spots ahead of the Pope! When asked what he thought of this honor, he said, *“Um, I can’t even get my dog to stop [going to the bathroom] in the house...The whole thing is patently ridiculous. It’s baseball--a pastime involving a lot of chance. If Zobrist’s ball is three inches farther off the line, I’m on the hot seat for a failed five-year plan. And I’m not even the best leader in our organization; our players are.”*

The word ***“servant”*** is the word used for table waiter and is the root of the word for deacon. It literally means, *“one who waits on and serves others.”* The word ***“slave”*** refers to those who are owned by another and is completely subservient to the wishes and demands of the master.

I read a story this week about a pastor in Sierra Leone who found an incredibly rare 706-carat diamond and made the selfless decision to give it to the country’s government in hopes that they will use it to improve the lives of all the citizens. *“I believe the government can do more, especially at a time when the country is undergoing some economic challenges,”* stated the pastor. This diamond is valued at \$62 million! The largest diamond previously was discovered in 1972 and sold for \$2.5 million.

If the disciples wanted to be leaders in His kingdom, they first had to elevate others. What is a servant? It’s someone whose heart is intent upon, and whose will is bound to, the will and wishes of another. If I am your servant, then what you say goes. You have the last word.

Let’s think through the difference between a servant and a volunteer. A volunteer picks and chooses *when* and even *whether* to serve. A servant serves no matter

what. A volunteer serves when convenient; a servant serves out of commitment. Someone said it well: *“The servant does what he is told when he is told to do it. The volunteer does what he wants to do when he feels like doing it.”* Friends, Jesus didn’t recruit volunteers; He redeemed us to be servants.

Someone posted this...

*Lord I want to do what you ask
In the way that you ask
For as long as you ask
Because you asked*

One of the clearest biblical images of this single-minded resolve to put others first is found in Psalm 123:2: ***“As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God.”*** When the master moves his finger in command, the servant simply obeys. A true servant is one who has learned to subdue the defiant autonomy of self and to subject the will to the wishes of another.

I like the motto of the California Conservation Corps: *“Long hours, hard work, low pay.”* Interestingly, this is how they recruit millennials...and it’s very effective.

Here’s the principle: If we want to become truly great then we must give up personal rights and serve others. Jesus is saying something like this: *Consider everyone as someone to be served and consider everyone to be your master.* We must take opportunities to serve because we are obligated to serve. Remember that the true test of whether you’re a servant is to consider how you repond when you’re treated like one. Jesus defined a servant’s job description in Luke 17:10: ***“So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’”***

4. Embrace the example of Jesus. Jesus does not just shake up our self-centered motives and tell us to prepare for problems. He also challenges us to elevate others. And, in case we’re wondering how to do this, He offers Himself as the perfect role model. Look at verse 45: ***“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*** This verse is really the summary of the Gospel of Mark – Jesus is *Servant* and *Savior*. He served the needs of others and then demonstrated the ultimate act of servanthood when He gave His life as payment for our sins, so that we can be set free.

Let's unpack the word "**ransom.**" This was the price for redeeming or freeing slaves or prisoners. Thankfully, we no longer have slavery in our country, but actually, we do. It's called "sex trafficking" and it takes place right here in this community. I was delighted to hear that Kim (Taylor) Contreres, one of our Go Team partners, has just received the "Woman of the Year" award for Fresno, California! She received this in part for her ministry to those who have been trafficked. She is doing all she can to free women from this modern day slavery.

The image of the word "**ransom**" is of slaves being offered on the marketplace and someone paying the price to set them free. There are three words for ransom in the New Testament.

- *Agorazo* = "to purchase a slave"
- *Exagorazo* = "to purchase out"
- *Lutroo* (this is the word here) = "to release or set free"

Jesus gave His life voluntarily and vicariously, meaning that what He did was *for* us, *instead* of us, *in our place*. 1 Timothy 2:5-6: "***For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all...***"

He paid the price and in exchange, we are set free. We give Him our rottenness and in exchange, He gives us His righteousness. That's the GREAT EXCHANGE, which will be our theme for our 5 services on Easter weekend.

You've probably heard that our yard signs have the wrong date on them. That was my mistake. Some of you have made your own modifications – Nick Frey posted a pic with this caption: "*I got you, bro.*" Thankfully, we have a little better fix for this because Sheila Kuriscak thought of a way to make a new number on a sticker. Marie Guyton spent a lot of time this week revising our signs and cutting out numbers that can be used to fix the sign in your yard. These numbers are available in envelopes at Guest Services. The signs in the lobby have already been fixed if you've not taken one yet.

Jesus has fixed our wrongs by covering our sins. And in exchange He has given us everything we need. I encourage you to invite at least one person to one of our Easter services. This could be our motto: *Everyone invite one!*

Here are four challenges.

1. **Serve whenever you can.**
2. **Serve wherever you can.**
3. **Serve whoever is in need.**
4. **Be willing to do whatever it takes.**

When our daughter Emily served as a missionary in the Dominican Republic she had a blog with this title: *“Do what you can...with what you have...where you are.”*

Monitor your motives. Prepare for problems. Elevate others. Embrace the example of Jesus.

And that might mean letting someone else have the first pancake. Who’s willing to be like Jesus?

Closing Song: “Jesus Messiah”

Jesus Messiah, Name above all names
Blessed Redeemer, Emmanuel
The Rescue for sinners
The Ransom from heaven
Jesus Messiah, Lord of all