

Jesus, Our Servant?

Mark 10:45 & Selected Scriptures

By **Bryn MacPhail**

Last Sunday, we addressed the age-old question, 'How does one get into heaven?'. And we learned from the example of 'The Rich Young Ruler' that no amount of zeal, humility, sincerity, morality, or even the sum of those qualities will gain us entry into God's kingdom.

Rather, what we learned from Jesus is that *in order to get into heaven we must cast away every notion that we can get there by our own doing*. To get into heaven requires that we cast our self-sufficiency out the window and trust in the sufficiency of Christ alone. Or as Christ put it, "(unless we) receive the kingdom of God like a little child (we) shall not enter it" (Mk. 10:15).

Another way of putting this is to say that no amount of service on your part will get you into heaven. If we are to gain entry into the kingdom of God, Christ must serve on our behalf. This is what Jesus tells His disciples in Mark 10, 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."

We see then, that the promise of salvation is not for those who serve Jesus, but it is for those who are served by Jesus. As John Piper puts it, "the gospel is not a 'Help Wanted' sign, it is a 'Help Available' sign" (Piper, *Desiring God*, 146). Jesus states this in the plainest of terms when He says, "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (10:45).

Now, having established that our salvation comes through Christ serving us, it is important for us to recognize our need to be continually served by Christ. You see, some Christians think that all we need is for Christ to redeem us--and after Christ redeems us, it is up to us to turn around and serve Him. This is not entirely true. According to the Bible, if we are to live the Christian life as it is meant to be lived, we must continue to allow Christ to serve us.

Admittedly, allowing anyone to serve us--even Christ--is not an easy thing. Our tendency is to earn our own way, to do our own thing, to chart our own path. Typically, if someone serves us, our instinct is to turn around and serve them. We have this notion that service should always be rewarded with payment, and for good reason--our entire economic structure is built around this premise.

Yet, Christ offers a different model than what our world does. Christ says, "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve". This is what sets Christianity apart from virtually every world religion. In virtually every world religion, salvation is gained through offering appropriate service to the deity. In Christianity, however, salvation is gained when the Deity serves the created being.

This notion of the Deity serving the created being is scandalous to the natural mind, and it was scandalous to the apostle Peter who exclaimed to Christ, "You shall never wash my feet" (Jn. 13:8). What Peter was saying was, "Jesus, as the Son of God, it is inappropriate for You to serve me." But what does Jesus say to Peter in reply? "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me"(Jn.13:8). Jesus says to Peter, and He says to us, "If I do not (serve) you, you have no part with Me."

I admit, that when these passages of Scripture were first brought to my attention I was a bit confused. I was a bit confused because I was always taught how important it was to serve Christ. I also knew that the apostle Paul, on many occasions, had described himself as a "bond-servant" of Christ (Rom. 1:1).

How then, are we to reconcile the Bible passages that call for our service and those passages that demand that we allow Christ to serve us? What I concluded is that *there is a wrong way to serve Christ*. There is a way of serving Christ that does not bring Him honour. And since a great many of you here today are engaged in serving Christ, we would do well to ensure that we are not serving Christ in vain.

When the apostle Paul was in Athens, we read about the wrong way to serve God in Acts 17:25, where Paul says, "(God) is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things". In other words, God does not want to be served in a way that implies we are supplying His need or offering Him something that He does not already own (Piper).

How then does God want to be served? *God wants to be served by people who are being served by Christ*. This is the message of 1 Peter 4:11, "whoever serves let him do so with the strength which God supplies". God does not want your service without Christ's help. Without Christ serving us, God says through Isaiah that "our righteous deeds are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

You may want to ask, 'What is God's purpose here? Why does God, through Christ, want to do all the serving?' This too, is answered in 1 Peter 4:11, "whoever serves let him do so with the strength which God supplies; *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*".

When Christ serves us, God gets the glory. And what is the chief end of man but to glorify God and to enjoy Him? We conclude, therefore, that in order to fulfill our

chief end we must allow Christ to serve us.

I see in Scripture two main reasons for serving God with the strength He supplies. *The first reason for serving God with the strength He supplies is so that God may be glorified.* If God's glory is truly our concern, we will refuse to serve Him with our strength alone.

The standard that Scripture sets is that the giver gets the glory. We see this in Psalm 50, verse 15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I shall rescue you, and you will honour Me." Our task is simply to call upon God to serve us in times of trouble and, by delivering us, God gets the honour.

Do you see the equation at work here? The one in need does not get the glory. It is the one who helps, it is the one who serves, it is the one who delivers who gets the glory. If God needs our help, we get the glory, not Him. But this is not the case--God does not need us, He "is not served by human hands, as though He needed anything". When we need God's help, when we call for God's help, He gets the glory.

The second reason we need to serve God with the strength He supplies is because that is the only way to succeed in pleasing Him. Remember Isaiah's words, "our righteous deeds are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6) without God's help.

And do you recall what Jesus said in John 15? "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5) . . . Apart from Christ you can do nothing. Apart from Christ it is impossible to succeed in pleasing Him.

The word "nothing" is quite definitive, don't you think? Jesus could have said, 'Apart from Me, success will be more difficult. Apart from Me, your accomplishments will be limited. Apart from Me, you can only do so much.' But Jesus does not say any of these things. Jesus says, "If I do not (serve) you, you have no part with Me" (Jn. 13:8). He says, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

The radical truth of Scripture is that "the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Mk. 10:45).

It is God's habit to make me learn, first hand, the very thing I will preach to you--and this week was no different. On Friday evening, 3 people asked me, at different times, 'Bryn, how are you doing?'. My answer to the first two was, 'I am exhausted', and both replied, 'You look exhausted'. When the third person asked me how I was doing, I asked them, 'How do I look?', and they answered, 'You look exhausted'.

The problem with this is that I was not quite done my sermon, and I was not quite

done my preparation for a funeral I had to officiate on Saturday. In my exhausted state, how was I to ever complete my work? What I did is I prayed, 'Lord, I can't do it--apart from You, I can't do it. Please serve me so that I can serve you.'

And here you are . . . the sermon was completed. And no, the prayer did not cause the Lord to magically finish my sermon. I still had to labour, but the difference was I laboured with the strength God provided.

This too, is the testimony of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I laboured more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

If our labour is to glorify God, grace must be the fuel. If our service is to succeed in pleasing God, we must learn to serve with the strength God supplies.

As you contemplate the different ways you are serving Christ, and could serve Christ, in this church, I implore you--do not trust in your own strength, do not trust in your intellect, and do not trust in your natural abilities. Serve, rather, with the strength God supplies--for the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve. Amen.

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