

“Real Stewardship: Serving”

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James 2:8-26 • Philippians 2:1-18

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Unless you’ve been living as a hermit under a rock for the past few months, you know that there is a major election coming up on Tuesday. As I have followed this race I’m reminded of something that John F. Kennedy once said. He said, “Mothers all want their sons to grow up to be president but they don’t want them to become politicians in the process. And Mark Twain is reported to have said, “Any man capable of getting himself elected President should on no account be given the job.”

What we all want in an elected leader is a humble servant of the people, but people like that rarely run for office and if they do we don’t vote for them. Our secular society doesn’t value humility or lowly service. But God does and that’s what we’re going to talk about today.

We are in the middle of our sermon series on real stewardship. Last week I mentioned that in the church we tend to think of stewardship as a pledge drive to raise money. But that’s not what the Bible teaches us. A steward is someone who manages what belongs to someone else. For example, when we took our cruise last February we had a cabin steward, actually a team of stewards, who were responsible for making sure our room was satisfactory. They *managed* our room. It didn’t belong to them, but they were responsible for keeping things in the way the owner of the room wanted.

In the same way you and I are called by God to be stewards of his gifts and to use them in the way He desires. Those gifts certainly include money, but the Bible is clear that God owns everything in the world. So one of the gifts He calls us to manage is our time. As we discussed last week, some of that time we are expected to use in prayer, in a relationship with Christ.

This week we want to look at the second component of real stewardship, *servicing*. Both of our Scripture readings today show us that genuine Christian faith involves our serving God by serving other people. Paul says in Philippians

2:4, “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” In other words, love your neighbor as yourself. Serving others is not something that’s a good idea if we have some time to give. Donald Whitney says, “there is no such thing as spiritual unemployment or spiritual retirement in the Kingdom of God.” When God saved us He called us into His service.

Our reading from James 2 makes this clear. “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?” The point that James is making here is that it’s not enough for us to have intellectual faith. We can’t just agree to the right theology. He points out that “even the demons believe—and shudder!” But their knowledge of the truth of God doesn’t result in right actions. They are in rebellion. Genuine faith results in actions; it results in serving in God’s Kingdom by ministering to other people.

There are several reasons that we find here for serving other people. The first reason is because of *humility*. Philippians 2:3 says, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” Serving other people’s needs ahead of our own not only requires humility, but it helps us develop it as well. Serving other people helps us break down the sin of pride in our lives.

The second motivation for serving others is love. In Galatians 5:13 the Apostle Paul says, “do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” We serve because we love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and because we love our neighbors as ourselves. In our reading from Philippians Paul says, “if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, . . . complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love.”

The third reason for serving is *obedience*. Verses 12 and 13 say, “as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will *and to work* for his good pleasure.” This idea of “working out” our salvation doesn’t mean we are to earn it. Instead, think of it like a workout. To work out means to exercise. It has a similar meaning here. Exercise your salvation by sharing your time with other people.

The final reason for serving is probably the most important. We serve because Christ served. Beginning in verse 5, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” I want to point out the flaw in this translation. Where it says, “though he was in the form of God,” would be more accurate to say, “because he was in the form of God...” It’s not that when God came to earth in Jesus that he set aside his godly character in order to pretend to be a servant for a while. What we find in Christ *is* God’s nature. Jesus even said he “did not come to be served but to serve.” John Ortberg reminds us, “when Jesus came in the form of a servant, he was not disguising who God is, He was *revealing* who God is. So when we serve others we are becoming more Christ-like in the process.

So what are some ways that we can serve as part of our stewardship? It seems to me that there are three areas that need our attention and we can’t focus on one and neglect the others. We each need to be involved in all three. The first is in serving our family. Husbands and wives, every day you should be looking for ways to serve each other – not for any kind of “credit.” Secret service is even better. Set aside some time to be present for your family without any kind of agenda.

Second, we should each be looking for ways to serve within the church. Maybe it’s serving on a committee – every committee needs people to serve. Or you could prepare meals for church members who are experiencing a crisis or a loss. If

you have gardening skills we need people to work in the flower beds. There are lots of opportunities to serve here within the church family.

Finally, find a ministry to people outside of our church. As a church we should be looking outward to find ways to share the love of Christ in our community and so we would like for every group in the church – every Bible study, prayer group, Sunday School class, women’s circle, garden club, Loving Hands – we would like for every group to find some way to serve people who are not part of our church. This could include volunteering at Mission 911 or the Food Bank or the Pregnancy Resource Center. You could help with the clothes closet at El Divino Salvador. One idea is to bake cookies for the police and fire stations to show appreciation for their work. I know you are creative and will find amazing ways to minister in our community.

What’s important is that we serve with a generous and humble spirit. As Paul says in verse 14, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” The reason is so that we will “shine as lights in the world.” Serving people can be a great way to start a conversation about *why* you serve – because of what Christ has done for you. I hope that in a couple of weeks when you are asked to make a commitment of your time and talents that you will be generous with both in serving the Lord.

Amen