

Text: John 12:23-26 (Pew Bibles, pg.1065)

Title: “Saved to Serve”

INTRODUCTION

We’re thinking together about “Holy Habits.” Now we ended last week with this reminder from...

Titus 2:14 – (Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We are saved for a life of service ... eager to do what is good ... created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Our new life in Christ comes with service already installed.

ILLUSTRATION – When you buy a new computer or tablet it has certain programs already installed. Turn it on and that app or program immediately goes to work. The same thing is true in the life of a passionate follower of Jesus.

So we’re talking about Holy Habits. And these are stated in...

BLUEPRINT FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

PASSIONATE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MAKE IT A HABIT TO LEARN AND APPLY THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD

PASSIONATE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MAKE IT A HABIT TO OBEY GOD AND DENY SELF

PASSIONATE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS MAKE IT A HABIT TO SERVE GOD AND OTHERS

Now let’s open our Bibles to John 12:23. And as you’re turning I want to remind you that tonight we have our iServe Rally at 5:30pm in the Great Room. If you volunteer in any area in the life of our church, we need you to be part of this. We will celebrate all that God is doing through us as His servants. And if you are looking for a way to get involved we want you to come to hear of some exciting opportunities. Read John 12:23-26.

Now before we move on I want you to notice something in v.26. Three times in this verse Jesus uses the word “serve” or “servant.” The word *diakonos* (we get our word “deacon” from this) means one who literally kicks up dirt in the activity of serving his master. This is a servant who typically would do the jobs no one else would do.

ILLUSTRATION – PHOTO - Many places in India produce power by collecting cow manure, processing it in a way that generates energy. I won't go into any more detail than that. I took this photo of a guy who probably has the worst job in town. His job was to use his feet to mix the manure with water. Now you think your job stinks. That's the kind of servant that Jesus had in mind when He uses the word here in v.26. Keep that in mind as we go back to v.23.

This all starts with some people approaching the disciples of Jesus with a request:

John 12:21 - They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus."

John 12:22 - Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

So here are some people who were curious about Jesus. They were part of the fickle crowd at this point in Jesus' ministry who were cheering for Jesus. Jesus knew there were many who were curious about Him, but not committed to Him. And so Jesus explains what it means to not just be an admirer of Him, but one who is truly committed to following Him no matter what the cost.

The fact is that the life of following Jesus is a life of service. You and I are saved to become servants of God. We are not saved *by* service; we are saved *for* service. A saved person who isn't serving is a contradiction.

Jesus here shows us four ways to think about the life of service as a follower of His. And it's not the way that we are accustomed to being recruited. When we are recruited for a position or an opportunity of service we're told what's in it for us. You feel good that you are part of something benevolent. You will get to see a child's life change, or whatever. And that may be true. But Jesus does just the opposite. In recruiting followers/servants He says, "Are you ready to die? Are you ready to lay it all down and still be abused? Are you ready to serve and have people treat you like a doormat? Are you ready to think of your own needs last? Then I have something for you."

Now that doesn't mean there is no joy in the life of a servant of Jesus. It just means the joy of where Jesus is leading us is great enough to make us accept hardship and suffering to get there.

So here are four ways Jesus wants us to think about the life of service as a follower of His:

1. A LIFE OF SACRIFICE THAT LEADS TO GLORY (John 12:23)

John 12:23 - Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

What immediately stands out here is that Jesus will soon be glorified. Jesus knew this when He prayed in...

John 17:5 - And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Jesus is thinking ahead to when, after the crucifixion, He will be raised with a new body and return to the right hand of the glory of the Father. But the pathway to that glory would take Jesus down a road of great sacrifice. A few verses later Jesus said...

John 12:27 - "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

What is this hour that troubles the heart of Jesus? It is the hour of His suffering and sacrificial death. And His soul is troubled by this. He will die on the way to the glory the Father has for Him.

A life of service, if it is true service, is a life of sacrifice. It costs you something. For Jesus it meant sacrificing His life. But Jesus was able to do this because He saw beyond the sacrifice to the glory that awaited Him in the presence of the Father. And you need to know that as you follow Jesus into a life of service, you follow Him into a life of sacrifice, but on the other side of that is the joy of the glory of God. There is a connection between the pain of the sacrifices here and the joy of the glory there.

But there's something else Jesus teaches us about the life of service. It is...

2. A LIFE OF DEATH THAT LEADS TO FRUIT (John 12:24)

John 12:24 - I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Here's another way of looking at the life of service. Jesus is talking about His death here. His death is like a seed that seems to disappear into the ground and die there. But it isn't what it seems; that buried seed is actually preparing to bear fruit. **SHOW STALKS OF GRAIN.** When the seed goes into the ground then it grows into a stalk of wheat. And the stalk of wheat produces a head of grain containing many seeds. So if that little seed stays in the barn, it remains alone. But if it is buried or planted in the ground there is the potential of many more seeds being produced.

So Jesus Himself was the "kernel of wheat" ... He was on His way to the cross to die, be buried, and be resurrected to new life, and if He did this there would be a great harvest of souls in the future. But if Jesus had not died ... if he had not been that seed that was buried in the ground ... He would remain only a single seed. But because He was that seed that fell into the ground and died, He has produced many more seeds ... you and millions of others of us through the centuries.

But Jesus is not just talking about his own "death." It is clear from the context that He is setting a pattern that His followers must follow. You see, Christ expects fruit from His disciples.

John 15:7 - If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

John 15:8 - This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

If they are to bear fruit ... the fruit of others coming into the Kingdom of God ... they will have to “die.” But their death will not necessarily be a physical death. It will be an attitude of life where they are as good as dead when it comes to their own desires, their own comfort, and their own convenience. And this is so contrary to the world where we are constantly told to be self-indulgent, to pursue the good life, whatever that costs.

But if we will die to our own comfort and convenience in service ... we will bear fruit. We will not remain a single seed. As we are planted in the ground and die to ourselves by serving God and others, the result will be more seeds ... more life ... more fruit ... more people coming to faith in Christ.

For this to happen we have to let God plant us.

There’s a difference between being “buried” and being “planted.” You may look at your life and your circumstances and think, “I am *buried* under this load. I am *buried* in obscurity. I am *buried* in this job ... I’m not going anywhere. I am *buried* in this marriage with a husband who doesn’t love God or love me.” That’s one way of looking at it. It’s another thing to say, “I am *planted* here in this situation. I am in an obscure place, but God has *planted* me here to grow and produce fruit. I am suffering greatly, but God has *planted* me here in these circumstances to grow and produce fruit. I am in a job that isn’t all that fulfilling; but I am *planted* here to grow and to produce fruit. I am in this horrible marriage; but God has *planted* me here to grow and to produce fruit.”

Perhaps God is calling some of us here today to be buried or planted in a life of service to God as a pastor or a church planter or a missionary. When you accept that call you are like a seed that falls into the ground, but the result will be a future harvest. Say “yes” to that call today.

The only way that the life of Jesus can be seen as fruit on your life is to join Jesus in dying ... dying to self. But there’s something else Jesus is showing us about the life of follower who serves. It is...

3. A LIFE OF LOSS THAT LEADS TO GAIN (John 12:25)

John 12:25 - The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

“The man who loves his life...” is a person whose life in this world is all that matters ... his goals, her interests, his ambitions, her pleasures. And Jesus says if that’s your attitude about life, you will lose it in the end. You will die one day and see that what you thought was “life” really wasn’t.”

ILLUSTRATION – I read somewhere about a tribe of people known as Inuits who live in Canada and Greenland. They are mighty hunters. They hunt polar bears in an unusual way. They sharpen a piece of bone from a wolf or some other animal, then they freeze it in a big ball of fat. They place that ball of fat on the trail that the polar bear takes. So a bear happens along, smells that ball of fat and eats it. He thinks he’s getting a delicious lunch, but what he doesn’t know is that what he’s eating isn’t going to keep him alive; it will kill him. The Inuits trail the bear and watch him as he gets weaker and weaker. With every move that bone in his stomach is tearing flesh. Soon he begins to bleed internally and ultimately dies. You see he thought he was saving his life by what he was

consuming; but he was really killing himself. And when we live selfish lives, concerned only for our own consumption and our own comfort, we may think we are “saving” our lives, but we are really “losing” it.

When Jesus calls us to follow Him He calls us to stop “saving” our lives in selfish living and to start “losing” our lives in selfless service. And we can do this with the confidence that we are gaining a life for eternity that is worth every sacrifice we make.

It has been true down through the ages ... people who have been greatly used by God were people who forgot their personal safety, security, selfish gain, self-advancement ... people who recklessly spent their lives to serve God and others.

So the servant life of a follower of Jesus is a life of sacrifice that leads to glory. It is a life of death that leads to life. It is a life of loss that leads to gain. And it is...

4. A LIFE OF HUMILITY THAT LEADS TO HONOR (John 12:26)

John 12:26 - Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

First I want you to look at the last sentence of that verse: “My Father will honor the one who serves me.” Remember I said at the beginning that this is the picture of a servant who literally kicks up dirt in the activity of serving his master, no matter how menial the task. Typically there isn’t much honor to a position like this. But Jesus’ point is that when you humble yourself in a life of service in this life you can look forward to being honored by the Father in the future.

ILLUSTRATION – Next Sunday night at the end of the Super Bowl either the Denver Broncos or the Seattle Seahawks will be on a platform before hundreds of millions of viewers as world champions. They’ll pass the Lombardi Trophy around, and then the Super Bowl MVP will be announced. What a great honor for those fifty players.

But the Bible tells us of a day when we as followers of Jesus will stand before the Father in heaven and hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” and we’ll be rewarded for the service we have rendered to our Lord. The pathway to that honor is a life of humble service.

Now notice the first part of that verse. “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant will also be.” We would expect Jesus to say, “Whoever follows me will serve me.” That is true and that is what I’ve been saying. However, Jesus reverses this. He says, “Whoever serves me must follow me.” Why would Jesus say it that way? I think it is because we often want to serve Jesus without really following Him.

There are three things that usually happen when we serve without following Jesus:

- First, we serve Him on our own terms. If I’m serving without following Jesus, I can pick and choose the places where I want to serve, the positions I like, the jobs that I want to do. And when I am walking with (following) Jesus I will walk with Him into some situations where I feel I am in over my head. But I’m there because I am following Jesus.

- Second, if you are serving Christ without following Him (whether it's teaching a class, giving food to the poor, singing in a choir, helping with the children, visiting in a hospital, preaching a sermon, or whatever) ... if you are serving Christ without following Him, the people you are serving will really not encounter Christ through your service. They will be helped, but they will not see Jesus. And that's what everyone *really* needs.
- Third, if you are serving Jesus without following Him, eventually you will burn out and quit. Sooner or later, ministry and service will become a drag when you are doing it for Christ and not with Him ... in your strength and not His.

CONCLUSION

Jesus could not have put in more clearly. The path to heaven is a path of service. If you're on the path to heaven it will be a path marked with service to God and others. If you aren't serving God you should take a hard look at your life to make sure you're on the right path.

Church, imagine how our church would be transformed and how our city/county would be impacted if we took seriously the words of Jesus ... ready to sacrifice for the glory of reigning with Christ one day ... ready to die to self so countless others may live in Christ ... ready to experience loss for the gain of eternal life ... ready to humble ourselves in service to a God and others to know the honor one day of hearing our Master say "well done."