

Whose Serve Is It?

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Date: 25 November 2007

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[0:00] Pleasing People is the book. Lou Priolo is the author. If pride's at the root, then dealing with pride must figure in largely with the remedy to pleasing people.

If we would be kept free, set free, and kept free from this crippling bondage of pleasing people, we must put on humility. Put off pride, and we do so by putting on humility.

So 1 Peter 5, 5. Clothe yourselves, just like we clothed ourselves this morning. Clothe yourself with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

So, just as you are covered this morning with clothing, your life is to be covered with humility in its expressions toward one another.

So last week we began to see how to put on humility. Jason led us through three basic points. We put on humility by seeking and granting forgiveness. Did we need to do any of that this week?

[1:35] Seeking and granting forgiveness by esteeming others better than yourself? And then by putting on the mind of Christ. Meditating on his thoughts in the scriptures.

Focusing on the Lord Jesus. Seeing humility in him is crucial to our own putting on of humility. You remember the children of Israel when they were bitten by the vipers in the wilderness.

It was by looking to the serpent lifted up that virtue, healing virtue, flowed into their bodies. So it is with us who've been bitten with pride. And the poison of pride runs in our veins.

It is as we look to Christ and him crucified that healing virtue flows to us. That humility, his humility flows to us.

And that's the whole dynamic of the apostle Paul seen in Philippians 2. Would you turn there with me as we begin this morning? Philippians 2.

[2:43] You remember the problem in Philippi with unity. And Paul is challenging them to put on humility.

And he directs them directly to Christ in his humility in the incarnation. And in his giving of himself on Calvary.

It's as we gaze on Christ and him crucified that our pride suffers a tremendous blow. Philippians 2, 5 to 8.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who being in very nature God. Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

But made himself nothing. Taking the very nature of a servant. Being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself.

[3:44] And became obedient to death. Even death on a cross. And it didn't end there. Because we read next that.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place. And gave him a name that's above every name. Because he who humbles himself will be exalted. And so we are being encouraged to humble ourselves.

Because we see our Savior humbling himself. Now part of the humility with which Christ clothed himself. Was taking the form of a servant. Taking the form of a servant.

And that's the chapter that we have before us today. We put on humility by taking on servanthood. The very attitude.

The mindset of a servant. Now what is the attitude of a servant? This isn't a rhetorical question I'm asking you. What is the attitude, the mindset of a servant?

[4:41] Because that's what we need to take on. Anyone? Chuck? Bidding his master's task. Bidding. Doing his. Whatever his master wants. Doing his task.

Okay? The attitude of a servant. Yes, Karen. I'm not concerned with what I think about what's going on. But I'm here to just do whatever I can to help me.

If you please. Good. Good. Verse 4 of our text. Each of you should look not only to your own interests. But also to the interests of others.

That's the task of us. Or the attitude of a servant, isn't it? He's concerned about the interests of others. He's there to serve them. And sometimes that means laying aside our own interests in order to serve the interests of others.

Even to put our interests under theirs. So you see the humility of servanthood. We put ourselves under others by putting our interests under theirs.

[5 : 43] Now isn't that what the Lord Jesus, the greatest servant of all, did? He left the glories of heaven. Why? Because he was concerned about his own interests? Not. He was seeing us in our misery and our need.

And he came to serve our interests. We needed a savior. And so he comes, the great savior. We needed a righteousness. So he comes and lives the righteous life to give us.

We needed someone to die under God's wrath. And so he comes and dies. He put our interest above his own. And so he's made in the image of, made a man.

Takes on manhood. Though he is God, he stoops to become man. And though he is the king, he stoops to become the servant. He was pursuing our good.

So that's the attitude of a servant. It's exemplified in our savior, par excellence. Now, this is not the piece of clothing that we naturally grab for in the morning when we're getting dressed.

[6 : 47] The servant's garb. We rather grab for the uniform that will make others recognize our importance. And therefore serve our interests.

That's the way we are by nature. Turn to 3 John. Toward the back of our New Testaments. The little epistles of John.

And we're looking at the third one. Because here the apostle writes about a leader in the church named Diotrephes.

And in 3 John, verses 9 and 10, this is what he says about Diotrephes. I wrote to the church. But Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us.

So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing. Gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers.

[7 : 45] He also stops those who want to do so. And puts them out of the church. You see the situation? My question is, what evidence do we have that this man was not clothed with humility?

Or with a servant's heart? What's the evidence here in verses 9 and 10? That this man didn't have the clothing on of a servant? Full of pride.

What's the evidence of that? What do you see here? He loves to be first. He loves to be first.

Alright, what else do you see? His gossip is malicious.

His gossip. His gossip is malicious. Okay? Anything else? Let's consider those points.

Why is loving to be first? The language would be today, loves to be the boss. Loves to be in charge. Loves preeminence. The chief place.

[8 : 47] The honor and power of leadership. Why is that love of first place, the kiss of death, for servanthood? Because they're only concerned about themselves and their own interests.

Okay? When someone is in love with themselves and their power and their honor, they're not thinking of serving, are they? They're full of themselves and not sensitive to others' needs.

They're full of themselves and their own interests. And they're full of themselves. And they're full of themselves. Then we see something of that worked out in the attitude of Diotrephes toward the Apostle John, who wrote and told them to receive these traveling ministers that he was sending out. And what's his attitude to the Apostle John and these preacher friends? Was he serving them? No, he wasn't having anything to do with them. In fact, as Ed said, he was gossiping maliciously about them.

He was tearing down rather than serving their good. Refusing to welcome the brothers. No hospitality to these traveling preachers. And what was his attitude and actions toward his own church people, his own members?

[9 : 57] Was it servanthood? No. What was he doing to them? For what reason? Okay, so he wouldn't welcome them.

He wouldn't have them into their home. But neither did he want any of his people welcoming these preachers that the Apostle John was sending out. And if they did, he put them out of the church. He excommunicated them.

He wielded his power and his leadership, his authority, not to serve his people, but to abuse them. And cast them out of the church for doing what was right.

So it's the very antithesis of a servant. To use his authority to domineer, to control people, to lord it over them. So this is a dangerous man to have in leadership.

And John blows the whistle and exposes him and warns against him, such a man will not serve his people's good, but will harm them as he seeks his own good. Now, Priolo points out the interesting thing that the Apostle John, who's writing this letter, knows something firsthand about this desire for preeminence that he's identifying in deatrophies.

[11:16] As a young man, he had his own struggles with this love to be first. And the Lord Jesus had so pointedly and powerfully had to deal with this very matter in his life.

Turn to Mark chapter 10. We see one of those instances. Mark chapter 10. And I want to read the entire incident so that we have our arms around it as we then begin to discuss what's going on here.

Mark 10, 35 to 45. Then, and the then is important because Jesus has just told them about going up to Jerusalem where he was going to be mistreated and suffer and die and rise again the third day.

Then, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. Now, it's always dangerous to say okay.

Jesus first wants to find out what it is they want. So, what do you want me to do for you, he asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.

[12:24] You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? We can, they answered.

Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.

These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.

For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. So there's a request.

[13:35] What exactly were James and John asking for? Well, you say they asked to be on his right and on his left in his glory, in his kingdom.

What exactly does that mean? What were the right and the left? What's so special about these seats? Places of authority underneath the king.

All right. You've got the king in the center on the throne. And those who are on his right and his left are the highest positions in the realm, in the kingdom. So it wasn't just the good motive of, Lord, we want to be near you.

That would be a good motive, wouldn't it? And we would commend them and say, wonderful. Just a closer walk with thee. But there was something amiss in their request, which comes out clearly in Jesus' response to it.

It wasn't just that they wanted to get some reserved seats in heaven. They had their eyes on these special seats. Most preeminent positions of honor in the kingdom of heaven.

[14:46] Think about that for a while. What they were asking. To be elevated above every saint that has ever lived or ever will live in heaven. I want a seat that's higher than Abraham.

That's higher than Moses. That's higher than David. Higher than John the Baptist, Elijah. I want to place a position that's above them all. And you begin to sense just how oozing this was of self and pride.

It was a most ambitious thirst to be first. So we learn that this is not just a deatrophies problem, don't we? But that it's even a problem of John who must later rebuke deatrophies.

It afflicted the two closest disciples to Jesus Christ. And so Jesus says, you don't know what you're asking. In asking for glory and honor, you're asking for suffering.

Because the cross comes before the crown. Suffering comes before honor. You don't know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup I drink?

[15:56] Or be immersed with the immersion of suffering that I'm about to be immersed with? He's just told them what he's about to drink. What's in his cup?

The cross. Mistreatment. Can they drink this cup of suffering? We can. And though we commend their intentions, they don't understand the weakness of their hearts like Peter.

That just in a matter of hours they will be denying the Lord, fleeing from him, forsaking him in his hour of need. You will drink the cup I drink. You will be baptized with the baptism I'm baptized with.

And in saying that, he predicts their sufferings. What happened to John? Well, let's start with James. What happened to James, the apostle in Acts chapter 15, or Acts chapter 12?

He was beheaded. So, you will drink the cup. And exactly that happened with James. John, what happened to him?

[17:04] Exiled to the island of Patmos for his testimony of Jesus. And so they did drink the cup of suffering, even as Jesus here predicted. And they would not be the first or last martyrs or men to suffer for Christ.

But, he says, to sit at my right hand or my left is not mine to grant. You're asking the wrong person. Those positions of honor have been prepared. They've been determined from before the foundation of the world by my Father.

And so you're at the wrong place. You can't get me to change what God has already determined here. Somehow, the word got out to the other ten about what they had requested.

And they weren't happy to hear it. Why? Why do you suppose the other ten became indignant when they heard what John and James had requested? There?

There? All right. One at that place, too? Someone else? Yeah, put it down over the other eight. All right. The other ten.

[18:11] Yeah. Yeah. So, now we see that this problem is not just a diatrophic problem.

It's not just a James and John problem. This problem is a problem of all twelve. About this time, you and I should begin to be asking ourselves, is this my problem? And that's exactly what we're meant to think.

Because it's a human nature problem. It's a fallen human nature problem. And we find all twelve of them in the same boat here. The thirst to be first.

A short time earlier, as they had come into the house in Capernaum, Jesus had asked them, What were you arguing about on the road? But they all kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

And so, sitting down, Jesus called the twelve and said, If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all. He's already given that corrective once to them.

[19:15] And so, now here again, at this point, when they're angry, they're hot under the collar, they're indignant with each other because they don't want to allow one to get a little higher position than them.

Their self-interest is coming out. So, Jesus huddles them again for a needed lesson on greatness and honor in his kingdom. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, you must learn to be the servant of all.

So, he shows them just how exactly the world's ways are with the ways of the kingdom of God. You know how it works in this world, he says.

And they did know. They had seen authority. They had seen dictatorships and all levels of society. And they had seen great men force their way to the top of the ladder by stepping on others, not by serving them.

And then once they'd reached the top, using their authority by lording it over the people beneath them. And that word, lording it over them, their high officials exercise authority over them.

[20:22] The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. That's a derogatory term. It means they were using their authority to control others in a way that was antagonistic and oppressive and domineering and tyrannical and self-serving.

They were all aware of the way things worked in Washington. The way things are with the rulers of this world. But he abruptly says, not so with you.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. So, here you've got the whole pyramid structure.

And everybody's crawling over each other to get to the top. And Jesus just inverts the whole pyramid. And he says, if you want to be great, then you've got to be on the bottom. And you've got

to serve all.

You serve all of those. Now, I've seen this passage used to destroy the idea of any authoritative offices in the church.

[21:29] Therefore, we don't have officers. We don't have elders in the church with any authority. Because, see, Jesus says that's the way the world operates. We're not to operate that way. How do we know that's not his intent here?

Well, we've got oodles of other passages that talk about the authority of the eldership in a local church. And that we are to submit ourselves to their rule and their oversight and so on.

That's not his intention here to throw out any positions of authority in his kingdom. It's the abuse of the authority that he is toppling. Rather, he's saying, you see to it that you use your position of authority to serve all of those that are under your authority.

To put their interests above your own. And so he talks about, if you want to be great, you've got to be a servant. You've got to be a slave of law.

Two terms. A servant. In the time of Christ, a servant was the lowest position of a hired laborer. They did the jobs no one else wanted to do or would stoop to do.

[22:38] They served tables, cleaned houses, washed feet. I think the nearest thing in our society would be a mom. If you don't want to do it, just leave it for mom.

She'll do it. That's the servant, you see. The one that does whatever no one else wants to do. And then the slave did many of the same jobs that the servant did, only they weren't paid.

Because after all, they were the property of their owner. They were bought and sold and owned. And so they too did these lowest jobs.

But they did it as one owned by their master. And so this was considered even more undignified, even more lower down on the social ladder.

And so you start to put yourself into that society of the day. And you hear Jesus saying that to his disciples. You must become a slave. To all.

[23:40] And you can imagine how their pride was stung. And they started to grapple with what Jesus is saying. Honor goes to the humblest.

First place goes to the slave of all. See who can stoop the lowest. See who can serve the most. That's the way to greatness. The way up, as we saw last week, is the way down in Christ's kingdom.

And that's exactly opposite, as so many things are in the kingdom of Christ, in the world. Satan just turns everything upside down. And here Christ is putting everything back the right way up.

This is the way to true honor and glory. Now, it's opposite.

Have you thought about why is this opposite to the world's way? It's that way because it's exactly opposite to their flesh. Their human nature.

[24:42] And what is the world, after all, but corporate flesh? It's the flesh of a whole bunch of unregenerate men. And so if we, in our own sinful nature, find this humility and servanthood to have an aversion to it, so we should expect that the world made up of the same flesh acting together would also have an aversion to humble servanthood.

And that is what we find. So here's the lesson. Here's the command. Here's the directive, the sermon on humble servanthood.

Have we put on the attitude of a servant? Have we clothed ourselves this morning with this humble attitude of a servant? I think the best test for that is what you do when you're treated like a servant. When someone treats you like a servant, what's your reaction? Do you get on with it? Or do you have a violent reaction? Who does he think I am?

His servant? Precisely. You haven't put on servanthood yet. You haven't put on the clothing of humility and humble servanthood. Because he who has it will become a slave to all.

[26:04] Now, Jesus leaves them with an example before he finishes off this sermon on humble servanthood. And it's the example of himself.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. Even. Even. Even.

Do you see that word? Even the Son of Man. You can't find an example greater than this. Why is that? Why is Jesus the greatest example of servanthood?

He stooped the lowest. Where did he start? He started the highest. He was equal with God. Stoops the lowest.

So you can't top it. Because no one starts higher and no one stoops lower. Being God to the hellish death of the cross. So, even the Son of Man.

[26:59] Even me. I haven't come to be served. But to serve. He stoops so low as to become the servant of slaves.

Isn't that what you and I were? Slaves of sin. Slaves of the devil. And he stoops to be the servant of slaves. Exactly what he's telling them.

You must become the slave of all. Willing to serve all. So he sets his own example out. And it becomes a motivation for us to do the same.

Doesn't it? How does that work? How does Jesus' example motivate you to be clothed with humility? I'm assuming it does.

That's why he puts it here. What's some of the prods and pricks that you feel from his example, Roger? What? What? We are being hired in Christ.

[28:01] If we put ourselves above him, we don't know how we ourselves can do that. Okay, that's a good point. We're exalting ourselves above Him.

If I can't stoop, who do I think I am? When He's stooped. Good. That'll poke you, won't it? Anything else? The example of Jesus that motivates you there?

When He was treated so wrongly, and yet He stooped, humbling to those wrongs, who are we to not do the same?

And it's only by His grace that we might not be guilty of love. Good. There's a motivating power in the life of Christ, and we need to tap into it.

We need to think about His life. We need to focus on Jesus, looking unto Jesus. And as we see Him, and as we see His service, it pricks us to do the same.

[29:10] It spurs us on. Think about the extent of His service. When I see the extent to which He stoops and serves, how can I ever start setting limits?

Well, I'll go this far, but no further. I'll stoop this low, but no further. I can't do that anymore. Jesus won't let me do it. His own example shames me out of my setting limits on my service to others. When I'm thinking that something's costing me too dearly to serve this person. It would just cost too much. Then I visit Calvary, and I'm shamed out of my selfishness again.

And there's a motivating power in the cross of Christ. To see Him serving me to the death of the cross, it's like pouring miracle grow on my humility. And that's what we need.

So what a sermon on servanthood they heard that day. You'd think that's enough to cure them for life, wouldn't you? But you know better. Why is that?

[30:10] It's because the hooks of the flesh cling much deeper than that. It's on the very night of His betrayal that they're back at it again, still arguing about who is the greatest.

And our Lord has to give them another lesson, a picture lesson, as well as a lesson in words. And He clothes Himself with the garb of a servant and performs one of the most humbling functions of a servant.

And in John chapter 13, you remember that whole episode of Him getting up from the meal and taking off His outer garment.

And there He is. He looks like a slave now. He even looks like a slave. And He's down and He's washing their feet. And when He's done, He says, now what I've done for you, you need to do for each other. If I, your teacher, do this for you, my students, no one is greater than the Lord.

The servant's not greater than the Lord. No, you do to each other what I've just done for you. Let me just come to a few applications that Priolo sets before us.

[31:12] Number one, keep your heart clothed with a humble attitude of a servant. As you put on your clothes each morning, literally, as you put on your clothes, clothe yourself with the attitude of the servant. Remind yourself of who you are.

I'm a servant of Christ. It's what Paul says. I don't preach myself, but Christ and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. So we need to be right about our identity.

Who am I? I'm here as a servant of Christ. I'm here to serve people. And so we put on our clothes and we dress ourselves to serve. We get in a mind frame, a way of thinking.

We think of His service, of us, and His commands for us to be the servant of all. So that's sort of the general application to this lesson, that we need to keep our minds in this attitude of a servant.

Here's a practical way to plug this in. Secondly, make a list of the closest people in your life. The disciples were told to wash one another's feet. Now, who were they?

[32:15] They were a tight-knit group. They spent their lives together, eating, drinking, sleeping, traveling, ministering. It was always them, 12, together. And so start with those closest to you who you have regular opportunities to serve.

And from there, you can move on out. So your list should have the names of each one in your family upon it. And then include someone at work. And then include someone in your neighborhood. Include someone at church. Put them down on a list. Then thirdly, think how you might serve each of them. Some opportunities just happen.

And they just arise. And if you're ready to do good, you latch on and do them. But we ought to be thinking about how to serve others.

How much time do we consider how we might serve others? The Bible tells us we're to consider how we might spur each other on to love and good deeds. Well, we should also be considering how we might serve one another.

[33:21] We do that for our own interests. I have an interest in this. And I actually spend some time considering how to bring that interest to reality so that I get what I want.

No, we're just a servant does that for the interest of others. And we think about how can I best serve their interest. And we lay plans and we scheme. And we're seeking to come up with ways to serve those on our list.

And so we ask of each one on our list, what are their interests? What are their desires, their goals? What do they want? What are their needs?

And how might I help meet such? How can I minister to their joy, their encouragement, their growth and grace? How can I use what I have and am to serve them good, do them good?

And then you're attentive to what's going on in their lives. And you talk with them. You may just ask them, all sorts of questions to get to the root of these things, how you might serve them. And then you pray for God to show you how you might serve them and to make you alert to opportunities.

[34:35] And then you just dive in and serve. As Jesus said, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Pleasing God then by serving others.

Time is nearly gone, but I think that it's, there's another important part of humility in this matter of serving that we sometimes overlook, and it's letting others serve you.

Explain to me how letting others serve you requires humility. We've seen how serving others requires humility. Why does it require humility to let others serve you? There. It means I need help. It means I need help. And right there, we're in trouble with our pride, aren't we? You know people like that, who are too proud to let others serve them? You ever been in those shoes yourself?

I believe that's exactly what we see in the Lord Jesus in his dealing with that woman at the well of Sychar. He's sitting there tired and thirsty at noon, and here comes this Samaritan woman to draw water, and Jesus says to her, will you give me a drink?

[35:43] He's humble enough to place himself, as he is in his place of need, beneath this Samaritan woman. She's got a picture. She's got something to draw and get water.

He doesn't. And he's willing to put himself in the lower position. You can serve me. Would you? I sometimes think that takes more humility than serving others.

And the Lord Jesus puts himself in that place and shows us his humility. And boy, didn't she flourish at that? Didn't she? She's amazed that he, a Jew, would be speaking with her, a Samaritan, and a woman at that.

He's that humble. He's that lowly. And so, humility will seek to stoop to serve others, but it'll also allow others to serve you.

I sometimes think that's illustrated as well by Peter's refusal to let the Lord wash his feet. Here comes Jesus and he's washing feet. You'll never wash mine, Lord.

[36:53] There's something of pride in that. Much that was commendable. Peter realizes the Lord is above him. He should be washing his feet. But Jesus rebukes him and says, If I don't wash you, you have no part with me.

You see, that's the whole... It was a picture of salvation and what was to take place in Calvary, that Jesus was going to wash his people from their sins by shedding his blood on Calvary. And you've got to be humble enough to be served by this Savior or you won't have anything of his salvation. You've got to put yourself in the place of need and say, There's nothing I can do to save myself. Lord Jesus, wash me. Save me. Oh, tremendous humility needed in letting the Savior save you.

Letting the servant serve you. So may the Lord help us then as we're putting on humility to do both. You say, Well, I'd like to be exercising the humility of letting others serve me. Well, if you're real anxious for that, you probably don't have the humility. There's a balance, isn't there? If you don't have... If you just have that and don't have the other, it's probably just selfishness.

[38 : 08] It's another form of the flesh and pride. May we put on Christ and know when to serve others and when to be willing to let others serve us. We're dismissed. Thank you.