

Servants of the Lord

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[0:00] Because the sinful nature craves not to serve, not to assist, not to meet another's needs or desires or to be of help to them.

No, the sinful nature craves autonomy, freedom, independence. So when we think of our relationship to God, we have to go back to the Garden of Eden as we often have in this study.

What was at the heart of the lie that Satan whispered into Eve's ear? It was autonomy. It was freedom from God. Satan convinced Eve that disobeying God was a good idea because she would become what?

Like God. Genesis 3 beginning in verse 5 says, For God knows that when you eat of it, that's the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good from evil.

So in other words, if you eat the fruit from that tree, you won't be under the rule of God anymore. No, rather you will be like God. You will be freed from his oppressive rule over you.

[1:10] So stop serving God and instead rebel against him. And Satan continues to spread that lie today, seeking to convince us that freedom from God is a good thing, that going our own way is the best way, that the only being we should serve is ourselves.

And if anything, God should actually serve us and our selfish desires. That's perhaps the more subtle lie that has infiltrated even the modern church.

This reversal that we are master and God is servant. Theologian David Wells says, We have turned to a God that we can use rather than a God we must obey.

We have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God for us and for our satisfaction.

And we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy.

[2:19] So we need the truth of God's word to combat these lies. We need to be reminded of who God is, of who we are, and of what a privilege it is indeed to be his servant.

Because we serve the greatest of masters. And the more that we see his greatness, the more that we will rejoice, the more that we will be amazed and astounded that we get to be his servants.

Not have to be, no. We actually get to be his servants. So let's begin by considering the company that we get to keep. We get to be God's servants in the company of many other godly men who have gone before us.

Moses. Many times that title of servant was applied to him. Remember when his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, they opposed his leadership.

They opposed his authority. And God rebuked Aaron and Miriam. And he said to them, Hear my words. If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, make myself known to him in a vision.

[3 : 21] I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth clearly and not in riddles.

And he beholds the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Or how about Samuel? What was the advice that Eli gave to Samuel when Samuel kept hearing God call out to him?

He told Samuel to say, Speak, Lord, for your servant hears. David too. David wanted to build God's temple. And the prophet Nathan initially told David, Go for it.

Do it. Build the temple. Well, God had other plans. Plans for David's son to build the temple. So God came to Nathan, spoke to him. And he instructed Nathan to speak to David.

And what did God call David? Repeatedly in his words to Nathan. My servant, David. Go tell my servant, David. And then after hearing from Nathan all that God had said, David responded in prayer.

[4 : 31] And how did he reference himself in that prayer? Over and over again. Ten times to be exact. Servant. The only title that he called himself in his prayer in response to the Lord.

He just kept saying, Your servant. Your servant. Obviously very intentionally. Here is David, a king. God's chosen king. And yet he still understood very clearly his place, his position before God as a servant.

We look to the New Testament. We see this theme continue. Think of the apostles like Peter and Paul. How do they refer to themselves? Even in the very greetings of their letters.

The opening introductions. This is who I am. Who is writing to you? I am a servant. We've seen this in 1 Corinthians. As we've worked through that book in the evenings together.

Chapter 3. Paul asks two very simple, straightforward questions. What then is Apollos? What then is Paul? Servants. Through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.

[5 : 35] Paul is saying, I'm just doing my assignment that God has given to me as a servant of Christ. So I don't know about you brothers, but I am glad to share in this identity.

I am humbled. What a privilege that we get to share in this identity with these men, with these servants of God who've gone before us. They're a model to us of what it looks like to be in the service of God.

Now there's one more man that we're going to look at this morning, and we're going to camp on him. And that's John the Baptist. Here's a model for us.

Though he actually never calls himself explicitly a servant, God actually never refers to him. The Lord Jesus never refers to him explicitly as a servant. And yet it is abundantly clear that is exactly what he is.

That he knows he's a servant of Christ. And Christ thinks of him as his faithful servant. So we see this in John chapter 3. If you've got your Bibles, you can turn there with me.

[6 : 38] We're going to work our way through this text this morning. John chapter 3. And I'll start reading in verse 22. Verse 22.

After this, Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Anon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized, for John had not yet been put in prison.

Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, look!

He is baptizing, and all are going to him. So we'll pause there before we get to John's response, because we see that John's disciples and this Jew, they are presenting Jesus to John as his competitor.

John, you're baptizing. This is your big ministry. And now this Jesus, whom you baptized, he's starting a ministry of baptism too. And it's in the same river as you, in the same region as you.

[8 : 09] And now everybody's going to him and to his ministry. They're implying that this is now John's competitor. You baptized him, so why isn't he deferring to you?

It's like the guy who runs his own business, has a faithful employee, and then that employee goes and starts a business just down the street. That's the way that they're thinking of Jesus and John's relationship. Can you believe this guy?

He's baptizing people. And nearby you, he's growing in popularity. Aren't you threatened, John? Now let's hear John's reply. Beginning in verse 27.

John answered, His answer shows that he does not think of himself as being in competition with Jesus.

No, just the opposite. He thinks of himself as being in service to Jesus. And this is a model for us. As men, how can we be faithful in our calling to carry out this masculine mandate, to be in the service of Christ?

[9 : 35] Well, here's how. And according to Richard Phillips, the author of the book we've been using, we see three elements in this text. A key principle, a joyful attitude, and a humble resolution.

So let's begin with that key principle. And it's what John says in verse 27. A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

So John didn't view his ministry as his own. He didn't view his calling as his own. It's all been given to him by God. It's all God's.

It's all of him. All of John's ministry is through the power that God gives. All of his success comes from God. And so there's what? Contentment in that.

Who he is. What he does. How popular or successful John is. It's all traced back to God's sovereign purposes. So before even addressing his relationship to Jesus, before even correcting their understanding that no, Jesus isn't my competitor, John makes sure to say, whatever I am, whatever ministry I have, it's not really mine anyways.

[10 : 51] The words of John the Baptist here sound a whole lot like the words of Paul, the apostle. Remember 1 Corinthians 3, Paul asked those questions. What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each. Then he begins chapter 4. Same kind of way of talking. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

So he's drilling home. He's a servant. He's a servant. He's a servant. And what's the mindset of a servant? In chapter 4, verse 7, what do you have that you did not receive?

If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? So Paul sees no room for boasting. There's no room for jealousy or competition.

That's unbecoming of a servant. And John the Baptist is saying the same thing. He's not in competition with Jesus because that would imply that John sees himself as a self-made man.

[11 : 52] But he knows that he's not. He's been called by God. He's been equipped by God. His ministry has been given to him by God. So he's not concerned with the success of his ministry in comparison to Jesus and his ministry.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that John the Baptist is lazy and apathetic, contentment should not equal apathy. I think we could say John the Baptist is anything but apathetic.

I mean, he's energetic. He's determined. He's resolute. He's zealous. The voice of one crying out in the wilderness makes straight the way of the Lord.

This is the man who said to the crowds that came to be baptized by him, you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

That's not a man who's apathetic or complacent, but he is content in his identity. He's content in the ministry given to him. So he's not caught up in trying to grow his popularity.

[13:02] He's not threatened when whatever popularity he has begins to diminish, especially when it's diminishing because of Jesus. Jesus is the very one that John's ministry was to point to.

So John doesn't see Jesus as his competitor by no means. He sees himself in service to Jesus. As he says in verse 28, you yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.

So John knows he's not the Christ. He's not trying to fool anyone into thinking that he is. He's not interested in that kind of vain glory. He knows exactly what his job is.

It's to prepare the way for Christ. And he's content in that role because he sees himself, rightly so, as a servant. A servant of Jesus. And a servant doesn't seek the spotlight.

He's not in it for his own glory or for the admiration of others. And it's that kind of mentality that we too should have. Now, we're not John the Baptist.

[14:12] But whatever God has called us to in life, in the home, in the workplace, in the church, in our community, we should live as John did, in service to our master, working and keeping to God's glory.

John knew he wasn't the Christ. So when the Christ came, what was John's response? He was glad. John was glad to see him come. And that's the second element that we see in this passage together.

A joyful attitude. And we see that beginning in verse 29. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice.

Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. This was probably a bit surprising to John's disciples when they heard him saying this.

Far from being angry or bitter or jealous. No, John is delighted. He's joyful. And not just like a little bit joyful. He says that his joy is complete.

[15:22] Meaning, as one commentator says, he has the final and ultimate satisfaction of knowing his God-given ministry has been successful. Now again, John doesn't explicitly call himself a servant here.

In fact, he calls himself something else. He calls himself the friend of the bridegroom. Which in ancient times would have been something akin to the best man.

And I say something akin to it because this role was a bit different from what we would associate with the role of the best man. When you think of the best man in today's world, what kinds of responsibilities come to mind?

Well, a speech at the wedding. I heard lots of things. The ring. Taking care of the ring.

Making sure not to lose it. Sometimes those best men, we got the ring, buddy. What else? What else? Calm him.

[16:28] Yeah. Yeah. Calm him down. Be ready to encourage him. Yep. Plan perhaps some kind of bachelor party with the other groomsmen.

Sometimes, oftentimes I've found with weddings I've officiated, the best man has been one of those who signed the marriage license alongside the couple. Generally supportive, ready to help.

I once officiated a wedding where the best man had a plastic bag on him in case the groom was overcome with anxiety and needed to turn to the side.

He was ready. Tucked into his jacket. He had that barf bag. Those are certainly important responsibilities. But in ancient times, the friend of the bridegroom had even more responsibility.

He was the wedding planner. Can you guys imagine that today? Best men planning the wedding? That's a crazy thought. He was the wedding planner. He was the master of ceremonies. And he was the security detail for the newlyweds.

[17:36] He wore many, many hats. That commentator, William Barclay, says this. He acted as the liaison between the bride and the bridegroom. He arranged the wedding.

He took out the invitations or sent out the invitations. He presided at the wedding feast. He brought the bride and the bridegroom together. It was his duty to guard the bridal chamber and let no false lover in.

When he heard the bridegroom's voice, he let him in and went away rejoicing, for his task was completed and the lovers were together. That is quite the responsibility.

That sounds almost like he's a bouncer at the door ensuring nobody gets in who is not supposed to. It's quite the service that he did on behalf of the bridegroom. As Richard Phillips says, all along his purpose would be to serve the bride and groom, usher them safely into one another's arms, and then gladly and gracefully fade into the background.

His joy came not from being seen, but from the privilege of performing his service and the honor he showed to his friend and in the sheer delight of bringing the bride and groom together.

[18:49] So again, John the Baptist, he may not have said the word servant to describe himself, but in all that he said there, he was describing one who was serving, and a joyful servant at that, a servant who found his joy in the very act of serving his master, the bridegroom sent from heaven.

So do you think of serving Jesus in that way? That your joy might be complete as you fulfill your duty to him. James Montgomery Boyce encourages us.

He says, some people think that there is great joy in material possessions, but things in themselves do not satisfy. Others think that there is joy in worldly fame, achievement, or pleasure, but these goals are relatively unrewarding.

They satisfy at best for a short time. Real joy comes in being able to say to Jesus Christ, here I am, Lord, use me. And then finding that out of his grace, he is able to use you to bring others into a saving relationship to himself.

Isn't that true? That's joy. What joy there is simply in being in the service of Christ. And especially when we get that privilege of seeing the fruit of that ministry.

[20:11] Others coming to know Jesus as he uses us. Or others growing in their walk with Jesus as he uses us. That is satisfying in a way that nothing else in this world can satisfy.

Because we're serving the Lord. And there's lasting, eternal significance in that. And may John the Baptist also be an example to us to persevere when we don't see that kind of fruit.

When we don't see the success. Think of John. He was not always warmly received. John was rejected by many. What was said about him? That he had a demon.

Herod. What did he do to him? He had him imprisoned. And then he beheaded him. Yet he was a faithful, joyful servant of Christ. May that be true of us as well.

Whether or not others praise us or approve of us, may we be faithful and joyful in our service to the Lord. Now let's consider the third element of John the Baptist's service to Christ.

[21:13] And that's this humble resolution. We see it there in verse 30. Well-known words. He must increase, but I must decrease.

Leon Morris calls those some of the greatest words ever to fall from the lips of mortal man. And it's not just that John refused to take the bait of his disciples.

It's not just that he refused to be bitter and angry and envious of Jesus, but he went in the total opposite direction. He embraced any success that Jesus was having in his ministry.

That's what he wanted. That's how it was meant to be all along. And John embraced that with a humble resolution. Here is his master. And he was glad to serve him by seeing his own stature in the public eye actually diminish.

John the Baptist truly models for us the opposite of what we see in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempted Adam and Eve with this idea of being like God.

[22:22] he tempted them with the thought of self-exaltation. And here John self-abasing resolved not to be like God but to be in the service of God.

Now how do we get that kind of humility that John the Baptist had? A.W. Pink gives us this helpful blueprint to follow. He says, humility is not the product of direct cultivation.

Rather it is a byproduct. The more I try to be humble the less shall I attain unto humility. But if I am truly occupied with that one who was meek and lowly in heart if I am constantly beholding his glory in the mirror of God's word then I shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord.

Is that not what John was doing? Looking away from himself and instead occupying himself with Jesus beholding Jesus as he very literally did when he saw Jesus coming toward him and what did John the Baptist say?

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. John wasn't focused on himself. his focus was on Christ and humility was cultivated in him as he looked to his master and Lord.

[23:51] Now John the Baptist readily recognized the greatness of Jesus Christ. Not just anybody could hold the title of being the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Only Jesus can hold that title and John rightly ascribed it to him. And John would also say, he who comes after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

That's a man who knows his place before the Lord. He's saying that he's not even worthy to be the servant of Jesus. Because that job is exactly what a servant would do.

Removing those dusty, sandy sandals of those who come into a home, that's what a servant did. And so John's saying, I'm not even worthy to do that.

Christ is so great. I am so small and insignificant. I shouldn't even get to do the job of be a servant for him. That's true humility on display.

[24:52] And it's a humility that's born out of a right understanding of Christ. You want to be humble? You want to be a humble servant of Christ? And truly occupy yourself with him.

And you will see his greatness. You will see his power. You will see his might. You know what else you will see? You will see the greatest servant of all.

The one who, though he was in the form of God, did not account equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant.

The one who said that he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. The one who didn't consider himself above untying the sandals of others.

The one who washed his disciples feet. That's our master. That's who we have the privilege to serve. In Luke 12, Jesus was teaching his disciples.

[25 : 50] We'll finish in Luke 12. Turn over there with me. Luke 12. We'll begin in verse 35. Jesus is teaching his disciples and he's ultimately teaching them to be prepared for his return.

But he's going to speak in this more illustrative way. He's giving this illustration and he says beginning in verse 35, stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

So again, Jesus is also drawing on some of the words that John the Baptist spoke. Here is the bridegroom. He's returning. Here are his servants at his home. He's had his wedding feast. They're now at the door or he's now at the door.

Verse 37. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Okay, great. Yes, the master has returned. So we're about to serve him. We're going to untie his sandals.

[27 : 06] We're going to prepare the meal for him. We're going to get his bedroom set up for him. We have a job to do. The master is home. Now Jesus says, truly I say to you, he, the master, will dress himself for service and have them recline at table and he will come and serve them.

That is the opposite of what was to be expected. No master in that time. No master in our day would be expected or thought to do such things. And that is just what Jesus said he would do.

What a gracious master that we serve. So let's live out the masculine mandate. As men, let's live out our calling. Let's live in obedience to all that God has commanded of us.

Let's work and let's keep, let's cultivate and let's protect and let's do it all in the service of our king. So that when we have done all that we were commanded, we can say when we stand before the Lord one day, we are unworthy servants.

We have only done what was our duty. Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible. Revelation 22 tells us something of the new creation that Christ is going to one day return to establish.

[28 : 23] And in that new creation there is the new Jerusalem, the place where God will come to dwell, sit upon his throne, and we will be there. All of us who are in Christ will be gathered around that throne and listen for how we are described here in Revelation 22.

So I'm going to begin reading in verse 3 and listen to how the new Jerusalem is described and listen to how we are described. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads, and night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

So in the new heavens and the new earth, even there, we're going to continue to serve God. But as his servants, what will we do?

We'll reign forever and ever. You see that at the end there, and they will reign forever and ever. That again, not the normal activity that you would associate with a servant.

[29 : 33] Sweep the floor, do the dishes, hold the door, that's what you'd expect. Oh, but not for the servants of the king in the new heavens and the new earth. No, servants of the Lord, we are blessed to reign with the Lord.

Having heard those wonderful words from the Lord, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master. every day that we have in this life.

Until then, may we continue to faithfully serve him as we work and as we keep, as we live out the masculine mandate. Let's remember, we are ultimately servants of the Lord Jesus.

Let's go now in prayer to him. Lord, what a privilege it is that we get to be your servants, that you would call us out of darkness into your marvelous light, that you would redeem us by your shed blood from our previous slavery to sin.

We had a cruel, hard master. We were ruled and reigned over by our sin, and yet, Jesus, you have redeemed us from our slavery, and you have made us to be your servants under your lordship.

[30 : 52] You are our master and you're good and you're gracious, and we are so glad and so privileged and so humbled that you would consider us to be your own. So make us to be faithful, Lord.

Make us to be glad servants of yours, joyful in this world, helping others to see, look at our master, look at how good he is to us.

And so Father, build us up, we pray. Make us to be joyful in Jesus. help us to go from even here this morning with hearts that are all the more eager to serve you, to serve the Lamb who shed his blood for us.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Bluetooth. Bluetooth.