

IMPROVING YOUR SERVE

Matthew 20: 20-28

This past Tuesday night we all closed the books on another year. It seems as though 2013 flew by us just about as fast as the speed of light. And you can be sure that 2014 will not be one bit slower. The older we get the more we understand God's truth that life truly is a vapor (James 4:14). And seeing this vapor dissipate before our very eyes should compel us to heed the words of Paul, who wrote to the Ephesians to live as wise men and to redeem the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16).

Would you not agree that the days are evil? Who would say, whether Christian or secularist, that the days are not evil? No one. Beloved, spiritually and morally America is a sinking ship. I did not say that the ship cannot be repaired. I did not say that we can once more be a flagship for the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we once were. But we will not right the ship unless we make some serious changes in the way we do life. And I'm talking about God's people, the church, you and me. Unless we make some serious changes in the way we spend our time and our money. And today I'm calling you and I'm calling myself to examine our priorities, to take a long, hard look at what is first place in our lives, and to repent and turn back to Jesus if our highest priority is not knowing Him and exalting Him. Beloved, life is too short and hell is too real for us not to do anything less.

One of the things that we have challenged all of you to do to know Jesus more intimately is to read your Bible through during 2014. And I promise you, if you take the challenge you'll grow in your faith. But today I want to issue another challenge. And just like reading your Bible, if you accept it will bring much growth and much joy to your life. But most importantly, it will bring souls to

Christ and glory to God. And the challenge is, in addition to reading the Word that you serve your neighbor. That you serve your neighbor. And when you descend to serve your neighbor; Jesus said that you descend into greatness. Now, what child of God would not like to be great for God? Well, today we are going to learn about being great for God through serving others.

Turn in your Bible, please, to Matt. 20: 20 and let's see what Jesus had to say about serving others (read Matt. 20: 20-28). Every good mother wants to see their children succeed in life. But some moms go way over the top to make it happen. Now, there are certainly no moms like that here this morning, but some moms spend just about all of their waking hours taking pictures of their little angel and pasting them on Facebook, along with giving a running commentary on every minute of his day. Come on, moms! We don't care how many bites of eggs that Jr. ate for breakfast and or how many times he threw down his sippy cup. We don't care that he wouldn't go down for his nap. We hate to burst your bubble, but your kid is not the modern day baby Moses. He is not the American version of baby George. So please don't take a chance on shutting down cyberspace with an overload of pictures of every move he makes, from his first cry in the morning 'till his last coo at night. Two or three are just plenty.

Well, we can be pretty certain that if they had computers and Facebook in the first century that Salome, the mother of James and John, would have been as much of an addict as any mom around. She had the highest aspirations for her two boys that any parent could ever have, and she made no bones about it. She strode up to Jesus one day and asked him if her two sons could sit right next to Him, one on the right and one on the left, when He began to reign in the millennium.

But this audacious request was more than just Salome's doings. Mark's account of the same event mentions nothing of

Salome, but that it was James and John who petitioned Jesus. So we know that actually it was all three of them. The boys were seeking the glory of ruling and mom seeking it for them, plus seeking her own glory of parental success. And there was not one twinge of servanthood in their minds. And it was the same for the rest of the twelve. When they heard what James and John had done they were angry. Every one of them thought in his heart, "Who do they think they are? They have no more right to reign with Jesus than I do." They were all eaten up with pride.

Beloved, we know that God hates all sin. But if there were one sin that God hated more than any other, it would be the sin of pride. In the list of the sins that God hates in Proverbs 6, the one on the top of the list is a proud look. Have you ever wondered why? I'll tell you. It was pride that caused the ruination of God's perfect universe and caused His curse to fall on the entire world.

Who committed the first sin in history? Not Adam and Eve. It was Lucifer. According to Hebrews 1 God created Lucifer to be a ministering spirit, to be a servant, and being a servant required humility. Paul writes in Philippians 2 that when Jesus came to the earth He took upon Himself the form of a slave and humbled Himself to the point of death on the cross. Servanthood requires humility. But Lucifer had no humility. He did not want to serve God nor man. He wanted to be like God and rule over man. He was filled with pride. And as a result he led a rebellion against God and was expelled from Heaven. And then as the devil he caused Eve to commit the very same sin that he committed. When Eve saw that forbidden fruit, he convinced her that if she ate of it she would become like God, knowing good from evil, and her pride led to her fall.

And ever since, the entire world has equated greatness with fame and fortune and power. Lording it over others. In vs. 25 that's what Jesus said the Gentile leaders were doing. Throwing

their weight around, demanding submission and obedience, and believing themselves to be great. But you see, beloved, the Romans got it all wrong. They only had a fake **imitation** of greatness. Jesus says we do not become great by ruling like Him, but we become great by serving like Him. Look at vs. 26-27. Jesus says first of all that those who are truly great are servants. The word “servant” means and attendant, a minister. It is the same word that Paul uses for “deacon” in 1 Tim. 3. A deacon is an officer in the church who serves, but every church member is to be a servant. That’s one reason, deacons, that it so important that you are servants. Because you are to model servanthood to all of the rest of the church.

But Jesus uses another word to describe those who are truly great. He says that if you would be great you must become a slave. A slave has no rights. A slave is to do his master’s bidding without question and without complaint. And Jesus said that this is the posture of those who are great in the kingdom. They are slaves, His slaves, and they serve Him by serving others.

Now, I want us to examine this matter of greatness in God’s kingdom through serving just as thoroughly as we can this morning. For you see, beloved, to become great in the Kingdom of God is a great thing. And may God help every one of us to desire to become great in His kingdom! Now, you may think that you can never be great in God’s kingdom, that when God made you He just didn’t program your DNA with the stuff for greatness. But let me share with you four ways that you **can** become great - in fact – four ways you can be greater than anyone else in the Kingdom of God.

First of all, you can be great in love. You may not be able to preach or sing or teach a Bible study class as well as others, or maybe not at all, but nobody has to love God more than you. And love is the most important element in the Christian life that there

is. More important than faith, more important than hope, more important than speaking like an angel, more important than giving everything you have to the poor, more important than being a martyr. And you can be the greatest in love.

The same goes for faith. Would you not like to have great faith? Well, except for those who have the spiritual gift of faith, nobody has to have more faith in you. What about winning souls to Jesus? We are all called to be witnesses, and what endeavor for the Kingdom could be greater? Well, except for those with the gift of evangelism, nobody has to win more souls to Christ than you. And finally, would you not desire today to be great in bringing glory to God in your life? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Whether you eat, drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). And beloved, there may be many on earth that bring more wide spread glory to God than you, but in Heaven no one has to bring more glory to God than you. Not Billy Graham, not Tim Tebow, not Phil Robertson, not Kirk Cameron, not Mike Huckabee – no one.

But here’s what you must not miss. If you would be great in loving God, or if you would have great faith, or be great in winning souls, or in bringing glory to God, **you will do it by serving!** Each and every time. Let me explain what I’m talking about. If you are great in loving God then you’ll automatically love your neighbor. For Jesus said that to love God with all of your heart was the first commandment, and the second was like unto it, which was loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-39). And really loving your neighbor means serving your neighbor. For God said, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

And as for faith, let’s look for a moment at the life of Job. Job was a man of great faith. Job lost his wealth and all of his 10 children in a matter of hours, and he received the news in a matter

of minutes. What would have been your reaction? Here was Job's reply, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). And in the days following when the shock had passed but he was still utterly consumed with grief and unbearable physical pain, and when he was crying out to God but the heavens were silent, Job declared, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:15). And in triumph he also exclaimed, "For I **know** that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand out last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God (19: 25-26)." Job was a man of great faith.

But Job expressed his faith with more than words. Look at Job 29: 12-17 (read). Friend, Job was a man who served others! That's what real faith does. James put it as bluntly as you can say it: "Faith without works is dead, being alone" (James. 2:17).

But what does being a servant have to do with soul-winning? Well, Paul was the greatest soul-winner of them all, and Paul said in 1 Cor. 9:19, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more". Paul knew that you gain an ear to the gospel by serving. And what about bringing glory to God? Again, Paul is our best example. Paul said in Gal. 1:24, "And they glorified God in me". And it was Paul who reminded the Ephesian elders that while he was with them he provided for the necessities of those who were with him by his own hands (Acts 20:34). He served them. And who was it that built a fire for others to warm by when shipwrecked on the island of Malta? It was Paul. Paul was a servant, and his service brought great glory to God.

I have a friend who is a retired Assembly of God preacher. He pastored for about 30 years in Tifton, Ga., where Emily is now serving at the First Baptist Church. He had a wonderful ministry in Tifton. Many were saved. The Lord allowed the church to build a new facility at a new location. And Toby Stokes was one of the

most respected men in that town of about 10,000. As we were talking about his ministry one day and all that God had done through him, he told me something that I'll never forget. He said that he had a motto that he had tried to make a daily practice for years. And the motto was simply, "Help somebody". And that's what he did. Every day he tried to help somebody. And God honored his ministry in a great way.

So today I pass along Toby Stokes' life motto on to you as a challenge – help somebody. I don't ask you to help somebody every day, even though that would be a great thing, for Jesus went about doing good every day. And every day as we move about in this world we should be praying, "Lord, send someone across my path that I may help in Your name". But I ask you to help somebody, serve somebody, at least once a week.

Now, let me give you two things to keep in mind about servants who are great. First of all, great servants serve personally. They touch lives one-on-one. Please hear me closely. There are many tasks around the church that are absolutely necessary to continue our ministry. There are others that are a blessing but are not essential. But if you teach, or sing, or serve on a committee, or preach, if you are a true servant, in addition to these ministries you will still be serving others individually. It will be inconvenient at times and messy at times, but you will do it.

But if you would be a great servant, you must not only serve **personally**, but also **proactively**. You must make it a priority to help somebody who is hurting. You must be on the lookout for them. You must reach out to them without being asked. Pastor Chuck Swindoll said, "A true servant stays in touch with the struggles others experience. There is that humility of mind that continually looks for ways to serve and to give". So many of us have priorities that stand in the way of this. But beloved, you don't have to have the cleanest house in town, the prettiest flower bed,

the neatest lawn, or the cleanest car. You don't have to spend so much time entertaining yourself. Avocations are great. We all need to come aside and rest awhile, as Jesus told His disciples. But many of us spend hours and hours each week resting awhile or recreating awhile when Jesus would say to us, "Get out and serve awhile".

A number of years ago astronaut James Irwin spoke at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Washington. Colonel Irwin was a part of a crew that flew to the moon several decades ago. He was certainly a celebrity when he returned. But here's what he told that group of broadcasters: "As I was returning to earth, I realized that I was a servant – not a celebrity. So I am here as God's servant on planet Earth to share what I have experienced that others might know the glory of God". Three cheers for James Irwin. Who on earth would have more right than him to say, "I have ascended to the moon. I have ascended to greatness!" But James Irwin said, "Yes, I've ascended to the moon, but I returned to planet earth as God's servant". James Irwin didn't ascend to greatness. What James Irwin had done was to descend into greatness. Here is how Bible teacher John MacArthur put it:

"The cost of true greatness is humble, selfless, sacrificial service. The Christian who desires to be great and first in the kingdom is the one who is willing to serve in the hard place, the uncomfortable place, the lonely place, the demanding place, the place where he is not appreciated and may even be persecuted. Knowing that time is short and eternity long, he is willing to spend and be spent. He is willing to work for excellence without becoming proud, to withstand criticism without becoming bitter.....and to withstand suffering without succumbing to self-pity.

When faithful believers have done everything they can for the Lord to the limit of their abilities and energy; they say to Him, "We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done" (Luke 17:10). It is to such disciples that the Lord will say in return, "'Well done, good and faithful slave;... enter into the joy of your master'" (Matt. 25:21).

Let me share with you one more thing before we close. In vs. 25 we saw the fake **imitation** of a servant, which was the Gentiles, the Romans. But in vs. 28 we see the genuine **demonstration** of a servant.