

GIVEN TO SERVE

Sermon by Mark S. Aites

TEXT: JOHN 13:3-15

INTRODUCTION:

1. The following ad appeared in a London newspaper a number of yrs ago:
 - 1) "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success."
 - 2) "The ad was signed by Sir Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer. Thousands responded instantly to the call."
 - 3) Some years later one author commented: "They were ready to sacrifice all for the elation of adventure and uncertain honor. Should God's children do less." (*Ency. of 7700 Illustrations*)
2. Further: "The great leaders of men in all fields have not been the arrogant and the greedy, but the servants. The real servants are true nobility..." (Ibid.)
3. **Matt. 20:26-28**
4. Our lesson deals with the willingness to serve, and our primary text is **John 13:3-15**.
5. The background of this text is important to our study.
 - 1) Our time frame is Thursday evening, the night before Jesus is to be crucified.
 - 2) The disciples are with Christ in an upper room.
 - 3) They had just finished supper together, and shortly would observe the Jewish Passover (**John 13:1**).
 - 4) Judas is now a willing servant of Satan and the Sanhedrin, and has purposed to betray the Lord (**John 13:2**).
6. What is most troubling about this occasion is the attitude of the disciples.
 - 1) Note **Luke 22:24**.
 - 2) Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry the disciples had thoughts of a position of great prestige in the kingdom of God.
 - 3) Their thoughts were not for a spiritual kingdom, but a physical one.
 - 4) That thought remained with them even until after the Lord's resurrection (**cf. Acts 1:6**).
 - 5) Once, as the disciples were traveling to Capernaum, they even debated among themselves as to who would be greatest in the kingdom (**Matt. 18:1**).
 1. Jesus responded by calling a little child before them.
 2. **Matt. 18:4-5**
 3. Clearly, it wasn't the answer which they expected.
 - 6) Even on one occasion the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee had a request of Christ (Note **Matt. 20:21**).
 - 7) The pride and self-ambition that existed among the disciples clearly needed addressed.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE OCCASION.

- A. Jesus, ever mindful of what was ahead, got up from supper (**John 13:4**).
 1. Of interest, the manner of their dining is different than we are accustomed.

2. The late Guy N. Woods wrote: "Jesus and the 12 did not sit at tables but reclined on couches. They reclined on their left sides with their right hands free to partake of food. Their heads were toward the table and their feet extended backward along the cushions or couches. This made the washing of their feet easy, not cumbersome as if they were sitting at tables as we do today." (Gospel Advocate Commentary On John)
- B. As Jesus rose up he removed his garments, likely leaving what was referred to as the tunic or inner garment on.
- C. In **vs 5**, He pours water in the basin and begins to wash the disciple's feet, and dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself.
- D. It was not unusual for the need to have one's feet washed in the day and time.
 1. It was the general practice in most dwellings for there to be a basin of water kept at the entrance way.
 2. Generally speaking, although there were roads to travel, most were simply dirt.
 3. In the matter of shoes, the item of the day was a tie on sandal. It protected the bottom of the feet, but did not protect the foot from dirt.
 4. The basin at the door allowed those who entered to be able to wash the dirt, grime and mud from their feet.
 5. It is my understanding that a hired servant was usually assigned the task of washing the feet of the guests.
- E. What Jesus was doing was peculiar; for at least four reasons:
 1. One, they had been there for a time; this was clearly not at the time that they had entered the building.
 2. Two, they had just finished supper and shortly would be partaking of the Passover; so it was unlikely for someone to get up and wash their feet.
 3. Three, the preoccupation of the moment was who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God; their minds were elsewhere (**Luke22:24**)
 4. Four, Jesus was the Master and what He was doing was a servant's work.

II. THE RESPONSE.

- A. With **vs 6** we return to our impulsive disciple, Simon Peter.
 1. No doubt the other disciples remain quiet and were probably perplexed at the Lord's actions, but Peter couldn't keep quiet.
 2. That impulsive nature came out as he began to question Jesus. "*Lord, are You washing my feet?*"
 3. In the Greek, the pronouns *you* and *my* in this text are intense and emphatic.
 4. Peter would have said it with emphasis on both pronouns: "*Are **YOU** going to wash **MY** feet?*"
 5. Peter was abhorred with the very thought.
- B. Jesus very compassionately responded (Note **13:7**).
 1. It is true, there will come a time when Peter will understand this.
 2. Later, Peter will pen **1 Pet. 5:5**.

- C. But now Peter erupts; his impulsiveness and lack of temperament comes spewing forth (**13:8**).
- D. In his frustration of the moment, Peter forgot what the Lord taught on discipleship.
 - 1. **Matt. 16:24**
 - 2. Stubbornness has no place in the kingdom of God and Peter needed to yield to God's will instead of fight it.
- E. Now, of great interest, note how quickly Peter changed his mind (**13:9**).
 - 1. As Peter realized the impact of what Jesus was saying, and the danger of being excluded from God's kingdom for rebellion he just didn't want his feet washed
 - 2. He was ready for a bath.
- F. Peter was quick to speak or act with little thought, but when the lesson hit home, he was willing to do what was right.
- G. Such is a prayer I could utter for every child of God.
- H. Jesus then responds to Peter (**13:10-11**).
 - 1. Jesus knew who among them would betray Him.
 - 2. He knew who it was that would fall in transgression (**Acts 1:25**).

III. THE LESSON.

- A. Note **13:12-15**.
- B. Although Jesus asked the question, "*Do you know what I have done to you?*", it is unlikely that He expected a response.
 - 1. Jesus was inquiring if they understood the deeper spiritual meaning behind his act of washing their feet.
 - 2. Doubtful that they knew, he proceeds to point out what they did understand.
- C. They were right in calling Him Teacher and Lord, for Jesus is certainly both.
- D. But what they didn't understand was the need for them to serve one another.
- E. **13:15** then becomes one of the most important verses in this study.
 - 1. Jesus was not setting forth a church ordinance to be observed, but a principle.
 - 2. There is no biblical example of the early church washing the feet of others.
 - 3. There is a reference in **1 Tim. 5:9** of a good widow washing the feet of the saints, but no reference to it in a worship context; or is it stated as a requirement.
 - 4. What Jesus was teaching was essential to proper service; and that was the need for humility.
- F. We therefore better understand what Jesus was saying in a text I mentioned at the onset of the lesson (**Matt. 20:26-28**).
 - 1. The reason for that discussion was the brief example I mentioned of the mother of the sons of Zebedee asking that her two sons be granted to sit on the Lord's right and left.
 - 2. She was probably moved to do so by her sons (**cf. Mark 10:35ff**). Mark's account mentions the sons asking Christ for positions of prominence).

3. Jesus on that occasion was teaching them that greatness comes through service and sacrifice; both of which are an outgrowth of humility.
- G. Humility is required to be a follower of Christ.
1. **Matt. 5:3**
 2. One's will and desires must give way for the Lord's.
 3. Jesus was able to sacrifice for others, and serve others because He was not seeking His own will.
 4. **John 6:38**
- H. Today as Christians we seek to follow Christ. We seek to follow His will and not ours.
1. Peter says that we must strive to follow "*in his steps*" (**1 Pet. 2:21-24**).
 2. As we grow in Christ, we strive to be more and more like Jesus.
 3. Song: "*O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art, Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fulness; Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.*"
 4. Peter gives an admonition (**2 Pet. 3:18**).
- I. The challenge then before every Christian is not wondering and waiting for someone to do something for you, but for you to do something for others (**Gal. 6:2; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 2:4**).
- J. Keep in mind that in every service you will bring glory and honor to God (**Matt. 5:16**).
- K. As you contemplate serving the Lord, and serving others, consider the words of Paul (**Rom. 12:11**).
1. Defined, the word *Fervent* means, "to boil with heat, be hot; zeal for what is good." (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon).
 2. "This word is usually applied to water or to metals so heated as to bubble, or boil. It hence is used to denote *ardor, intensity* or, as we express it, a *glow* meaning intense zeal (**Acts 18:25**)." (Barnes Notes)
- L. As we seek to serve the Lord, we need to rise up and do all that we can with intensity and fervency.
1. Draw in application from **Eccl. 9:10**.
 2. **John 9:4**
 3. Paul informs us that the Lord gave His life for us "*that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*" (**Titus 2:14**).
 4. **Titus 3:1**.
- M. As we search the New Testament for one who was a living example of what Christ was teaching in **John 13**, is a man by the name of Epaphras (**Col. 4:12-13**).
2. In **Col. 1:7**, Paul praised him as a faithful minister of Christ.
 3. We admire his example of laboring for the brethren, of which Paul again uses the word *fervently*.
 4. In fact, we find in **Col. 4** that the zeal of Epaphras went beyond Colossae, but also extended to Laodicea and Hierapolis.

5. What we admire is his willingness to fervently and zealously serve others.
- N. Question: how great is your willingness to serve?
1. Bro. Garland Robinson, in a lesson that he did when visiting Garfield Heights, at their lectureship in Nov. of 1995, suggested these things of a zealous servant of God.
 - 1) A zealous servant of the Lord worships God in spirit and in truth (**John 4:24**).
 - 2) A zealous servant of the Lord does good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith (**Gal. 6:10**). A benevolent spirit, acts of kindness and sympathy is held toward all, in and out of the church (**cf. 2 Cor. 9:12-13**).
 - 3) A zealous servant of the Lord seeks to edify every member of the body of Christ. **1 Cor. 14:26** *“Let all things be done for edification.”*
 - 4) A zealous servant of the Lord evangelizes with every opportunity. (cf. the Great Commission.)(**Acts 8:4**).
 - 5) A zealous servant of the Lord makes his calling and election sure (**2 Pet. 1:10**).
 2. Recognizing what a zealous servant of God is willing to do, again I bring it back to you; what are you willing to do?
- O. Please don't think that you have nothing to contribute to the work here.
1. I remind you that Paul says that all of us are members of the one body (**1 Cor. 12:20-22**).
 3. Every contribution made in your service will edify this church, glorify God, and bring all of us closer in our relationship to one another and to God.

CONCLUSION:

1. I would hope that every one here would strive for greatness in the kingdom of God.
2. Not seeking a position of prestige, but greatness through service.
3. For that to be a reality, one must truly be a disciple of Christ (**Luke 9:23-26**).
4. Service begins with sacrifice and humility:
 - 1) Are you a Christian?
 - 2) Have you given over your life to the King of Kings?
 - 3) Have you humbled yourself before the throne of heaven?
5. PLAN OF SALVATION
6. Christians, are you sacrificing and serving; or waiting to be served? (**Matt. 20:26; 23:12**).