

August 31, 2008 – SERMON SUMMARY

Reasons for Making Service your Lifestyle (Mk.10:42-45, Php.2:5-7, 2 Sam.11:1-2, Jn.9:4-5)

Introduction: St. Francis of Assisi, a friar of the early 13th century, was deeply impacted as a teenager by the poor & needy. At age 23 he began to care for lepers & beg on behalf of the poor; soon after he renounced his inheritance & spent the final 20 years of his life preaching the Gospel, crusading for the needy, caring for nature & animals. One of his famous sayings was, "Preach the Gospel at all times – when necessary use words." What St. Francis meant was that people would much rather see a sermon than hear one, & the best sermons are not preached from pulpits, but lived out in the world. This is not to belittle the importance of preaching, because Paul says it's through the foolishness of what we preach that people are brought to faith & salvation. But it's even more important to practice what we preach, living it out in a life of loving service! Paul told the Galatians, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." To encourage you in your service to God & others, here are three practical reasons why you as a follower of Christ should be working hard at serving, preaching the Gospel with your actions & your life.

1) First, our Lord Jesus, the One we claim to follow, was known as the Servant of the Lord, the paragon of service.

- In Mk.10 He talked to His disciples about their concept of leading, which was totally based on the world's examples: rulers who lord it over those under their authority & derive their sense of self-worth from "controlling" others. But Jesus told His followers, "Among you it will not be like that! Instead, greatness is defined in terms of serving others."

- If we would follow Jesus the Messiah, we have no choice but to let Him turn us into servants – & we definitely need to be **converted** into servants because we are not born that way. Human nature is naturally egotistical and self-serving. We need the Word & the Holy Spirit to work on us continually so we can fulfill our true potential as servants of the Lord.

- The truth is, you will either serve the Lord Jesus or you will serve some other master, such as the flesh, some favorite "idol" (material things, money, sex), or your own short-sighted goals that do not connect up with eternity. Jesus is the only truly loving Master; any other master you serve will crush you! Jesus is the only Master who restores & renews us as we serve Him, because He became a Servant for our sakes (Php.2:5-7). He knows perfectly what it means to serve, & He wants to teach us how to do it right. Serving God & others is the only way to grow as fulfilled human beings.

- Joshua led a life of service to God & His people, waiting on Moses night & day, serving as his right-hand man. As an apprentice to Moses, Joshua learned to submit his personal preferences to God's plan & make it his goal to exalt the Lord by his service, whether it was spiritual, military, or administrative service. This was what shaped Joshua into such a dynamic & fearless servant-leader, & made him an example for his people, so that he could end his days with the exhortation, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.... But as for me & my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh.24:15). Joshua had Moses' example & teaching to inspire him; we have Jesus' example, teaching, & Spirit to inspire us! How much more should our eyes be focused on service!

2) Another reason you need to be serving is that "idle hands" tend to get in trouble. Did you ever hear the saying, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop"? If your hands & your heart & mind

are not busy serving the Lord in constructive ways, you have an enemy who would be glad to occupy you with something destructive to do.

- We have a prime example from David's life in 2 Sam.11, when he sent the Israelite army out to war. At the time of year when kings normally went out to take care of military operations, King David sent others to do his job while he stayed at home, idle in Jerusalem, which meant that temptation & sin were on the horizon!

- David was king of Israel, a long-time servant of God, veteran believer, worship leader of his people, a psalm writer whose songs were inspired by the Holy Spirit! Yet look how quickly the enemy of our souls reduced him to a groveling worm, scheming to get his way, committing the foulest of crimes, just at the moment when his hands became idle.

- This is one of those terrible passages of Scripture we wish could be swept under the rug, but it confirms how genuine & trustworthy the Scriptures are: they don't cover up the bad news, they tell it like it is, they show us for who we are, warts & all. The passage goes on to say that one evening David was walking around on the roof of the palace & saw a woman bathing. He saw what he should not have seen, yet even when he found out she was another man's wife, David still sent messengers to get her & bring her to him. After he slept with her & she became pregnant, David called her husband in from the battlefield, thinking he would sleep with his wife & make it look like the child was his; but Uriah the Hittite was too noble to enjoy the pleasures of domestic life when all his comrades were still out on the battle front – he stayed at the king's gate all night long. So David had to come up with another idea: he gave secret orders to his commander Joab to send Uriah to the frontlines, then pull back from him, so that he'd be sure to be killed, & so it happened.

- David was supposedly a mature, long-time follower of God's ways, yet he walked right into the trap of lust & adultery, conspiracy & murder! The question for us is, Do we think we're exempt or above such temptation? Are you stronger or less vulnerable than King David, the Psalm writer "after God's own heart"? Paul says, "Let the one who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor.10:12).

- When your hands are idle, your mind is in neutral, & your heart is coasting, watch out! The enemy can occupy your hands, heart, & mind so fast it'll make your head spin, but with the wrong things! That's why Paul told the Galatians, "Serve one another in love, because the whole law is fulfilled in this one commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" If we're not busy serving one another, Paul says the alternative is to "keep on biting & devouring each other" until we end up destroying one another (Gal.5:13). When we focus on others' shortcomings & failures, we find all kinds of excuses for not serving! If your hands & heart are idle, the enemy will move in fast!

3) A final reason why you want to grow in your service is that here in your earthly life you don't have forever to learn the lessons that service has to teach you. Serving is one of the best ways of learning & growing, but our time is limited! Have you realized your mortality yet?

- Jesus told His disciples, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jn.9:4-5), meaning that when He is no longer visibly present, He's depending on His followers to shine His light into this present darkness; but our time for doing so is limited, like the words of the old hymn: "Work, for the night is coming, When man's work is done."

- Ruben Santana, servant of the Lord from Grand Canary Island, was 37 years old, in the prime of life, when he came to Madrid 8 years ago to pursue studies in Christian ministry, so that he could serve the Lord better. While he was working on his education, we had the privilege of serving with Ruben & his wife MariCarmen in a ministry to adolescents; Ruben had a heart for young people, & especially for lost people. He helped start an evangelistic ministry in the Sierra of Madrid, sharing his faith, leading home Bible studies, seeking to plant churches in the villages of northern Madrid. On Aug. 20th, just 11 days ago, he was on his way back to the Canary Islands to take care of some personal business there. He was scheduled to fly out that evening, but he found out there was an earlier flight with a seat available, so he boarded Spanair flight 5022, & was one of the 154 lives claimed in the awful tragedy that followed shortly after the plane's take-off. But Ruben's life was no tragedy; he wasn't wasting time when it came his time to depart this world. He knew his purpose here & he was busy about his Father's business.

- We never know when our time will be up, but Paul says, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord!" (Rom.12:11). If you keep your eyes on Jesus & His cross, you will never lack for spiritual fervor; & whenever it comes your time to go, He'll find you serving!

Conclusion: So if you claim to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, know that you too have a sermon to preach – with your actions! You've got a message to convey – with your example. You've got a service to perform – with your life! Just don't try to do it on your own – let the Lord lead you, teach you, correct you, & mold you into a real servant!

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