

The Way of the Servant *Philippians 2:5-11*

Introduction

One day a young pilot stepped up to the counter to file his first flight plan. The man behind the counter noticed the pilot was new, and trying to strike up a conversation with him, said, "Thank you, young man. Which way are you headed?"

There was a long pause. Finally, the young pilot responded, "Well, with any luck, I'm headed UP."

There are several people in this congregation that know far more about flying an aircraft than I do, so I use this opening illustration with the hope that my understanding is fairly close to being correct. I learned it from one of my favorite authors and speakers in the area of Christian leadership: John Maxwell.

John tells the story of a time he rode in the cockpit with his pilot friend Paul. As they flew, Paul pointed out all the gadgets and gauges on the instrument panel. One of them, John says, especially caught his attention. Paul called it "the attitude indicator." He said:

In flying, the attitude of the airplane is what we call the position of the aircraft in relation to the horizon. When the plane is climbing, it has a nose-high attitude because the nose of the airplane is pointed above the horizon. And when it is diving, you would call that a nose-down attitude. Pilots are concerned about the attitude of the airplane because that dictates its performance.

And then Paul made a statement that applies to today's text:

Since the performance of the airplane depends on its attitude, it is necessary to change the attitude in order to change the performance.

Our epistle reading today began with a statement of attitude. Did you catch it?

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...
(Philippians 2:5)

Other translations read:

... have the same attitude ... (NLT)

The Apostle Paul, who wrote these words, is encouraging his readers to change their attitude so that they become more like Christ. And then he goes on to describe the attitude of a servant.

After all, a "servant" was the image Jesus Himself chose for His own ministry when He said:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant ... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:26-28)

So in today's text, Paul says that to be like Jesus means you have the attitude of Jesus – the attitude of servanthood. Listen to these words from verses 3-4:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

The WAY OF JESUS is the way of the SERVANT, and Jesus modeled that by His triumphal entry into Jerusalem ... not on the back of a white stallion like a conquering hero would, but on a donkey. A humble donkey,

As you know our Lenten theme this year is:

THE WAY

And you know, we are building these sermons around a single verse of Scripture:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Today the way of Jesus is the WAY OF THE SERVANT. I want to make two observations:

OBSERVATION #1: THE WAY OF THE SERVANT IS DIFFERENT THAN THE WAY OF SERVICE

All across this country, high school students and other community organizations have "service" requirements that need to be met.

- Students need them in order to graduate.
- Employees are given the day off, and are assigned to a particular location, and given matching T-shirts to wear.

In late April each year our community hosts a "Clark County Service day" in which people are encouraged to do all kinds of nice things to beautify the area in which we live.

From our youngest days most people are taught that it is important to do nice things for other people ... just because it's nice to do things for other people.

- Every eight weeks I get a text message reminding me to serve my fellow man by donating my precious type O negative blood.
- Every time my children, and now my grandson, sign up for anything, a note soon follows to inform me that people are needed to serve as coaches, umpires, concession stand workers and so on.
- Here at church we provide you with countless opportunities to serve. We even publish a booklet listing most of them so you can choose.

Doing nice things for others was an expectation of my parents.

- I shoveled the sidewalks of our elderly neighbors because it was nice. I wasn't allowed to accept any money, although my parents would overlook an occasional plate of chocolate chip cookies. But if the cookies became a habit, I was expected to turn them down because I was "just being nice."
- I once made the mistake of telling my dad that I didn't "feel like being nice" that particular day. His response is the inspiration for this point of my sermon.

You don't have to have a good attitude to do acts of service.

Dad didn't say it quite like that, but that was his point. I didn't have to feel like it to do it.

You see, the WAY OF SERVICE is different from the WAY OF THE SERVANT. A particular attitude is not required. It is helpful, but many nice things get done in this world by people who have lousy attitudes.

OBSERVATION #2: THE WAY OF THE SERVANT FLOWS FROM THE ATTITUDE OF OUR HEARTS

It is the attitude of Jesus that makes Paul's description of Him so powerful. Listen to it from a more contemporary version:

(Jesus) had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The story of Easter is that Jesus – who had "equal status" with God – came earth and died the worst kind of death. Why? Because there was no other way for people like you and me to be forgiven of our sins.

- There had to be a blood sacrifice. Like the lambs on the altar in the Old Testament, Jesus the Lamb of God, had to be sacrificed. Scripture teaches that:

... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. (Hebrews 9:22)

So on this Palm Sunday, Jesus rides into Jerusalem to fulfill the requirements of the Law – not for Himself, but for us.

He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death.
(Philippians 2:8)

Selfless and obedient. Those are the characteristics of a servant.

1. The servant is selfless because he understands a simple truth that today is expressed like this:

It's not about me.

I don't factor into this at all. This is 100% about you. How I feel, what I get in return, the recognition I get ... none of that matters. It's not about me.

Earlier in this chapter, the writer offered these words to emphasize that point:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

2. The servant is obedient because she understands that she owes everything to Jesus. Jesus is Lord of her life. He paid the price for her. She belongs to Him.

APPLICATION

One of the illustrations I read as I was preparing this message compared what I'm calling the WAY OF THE SERVANT to drinking coffee. He writes:

How many of you enjoy drinking coffee? Of those that do, how many of you enjoyed coffee as a small child? The taste for coffee came over time with a maturing of your palate. Likewise, for many Christians, the heart of a servant does not come naturally, but with a "maturing" of Christian character.

Bill Hybels, former pastor of Willowcreek Church near Chicago, wrote this:

When we discover God loves us with an everlasting love and that we matter deeply to him, we want to serve (just like He did).

- He has given us salvation as a free gift.
- He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves.
- He has shed the blood of His most precious Son as a sin sacrifice for undeserving souls like ourselves.

When all of that comes together and clicks, an unquenchable, divine energy is infused into the spirit of the believer. There is an insatiable desire to return love to God. That love is returned to God through worship and service. It is so natural that anything short of passionate service seems unnatural.

One major cause of servant drop-out is a faulty attitude.

- Some people are motivated to serve because of guilt. They feel bad if they don't do something, so they say yes to soothe their own guilty conscience.
- Others are motivated by the belief that they must earn their way into God's favor and pave the way to heaven with their good works.

- There are also those who serve for the applause of people. They want others to notice their service and give them affirmation and praise.

If there is the wrong kind of attitude, you won't be able to keep a servant serving. If there is the right kind of attitude, you won't be able to stop a servant serving. It is just about that simple. (Bill Hybels)

Because Jesus led in the WAY OF THE SERVANT and not in the WAY OF SERVICE, our concludes with these very important words:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

Amen.