

Servanthood - the True Ministry

by Chuck Smith

The true ministry is serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and our lives should be a practical demonstration of the truths we proclaim.

Duration: 36:00

Scripture: Psalm 126:5, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 23:12, Acts 20:19, Romans 12:10, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Philippians 3:12

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of humility in serving the Lord. He shares personal experiences of humbling moments, such as slipping and falling on his face and having his zipper down while greeting people. The speaker references biblical teachings on humility, such as the verse that says 'he that exalted himself shall be abased' and the instruction to esteem others better than oneself. He also highlights the need for ministers to be sensitive to the needs of others and to genuinely share in their sorrows and trials. The speaker concludes by emphasizing the importance of having the right attitude when going out to do the work of the Lord and shares a story of a young pastor who learned the lesson of humility.

Transcript

This morning we're turning to Acts chapter 20, beginning with verse 19. As Paul talks to the elders from the church in Ephesus of the true ministry, his ministry among them. For Paul had spent three years in ministering to those at Ephesus.

But as Paul talks about his ministry, we are reminded of his statement when he said, Be ye followers of me even as I also am of Jesus Christ. For God has called every one of you to a ministry. Paul wrote to the Philippians and said, I have not yet apprehended that for which I was apprehended by Christ Jesus.

When the Lord apprehended you, he had a plan and a purpose for your life. God has a ministry for each of us. Now unfortunately, we have sort of divided the ministry and you might say the laity.

We say, well he's a minister, I'm just a member. There is no difference. We are all ministers of Jesus Christ.

Now there are different functions of ministry. Not all of the ministry is the preaching of the word. The whole body isn't mouth.

Now God has called me sort of as the mouth in the body. And I stand up here and I teach. But that's not the whole body.

The whole body is much more than just a mouth, thank God. And thus there are the eyes, there are the ears, there are the feet, there are the hands, and there's a ministry that God has for each one of you. And it's all vital in the total ministry of God to the community.

So as he speaks about the ministry, it speaks to each of us because we have each one of us been called of God to fulfill a ministry for the kingdom of God. And there are certain things about the ministry that are important to us. And as we look at Paul's discussion with these men of his ministry, we find a beautiful example for our own ministry as we seek to discover that ministry of God for my life.

First of all, in verse 19, he points out that it is serving the Lord. The true ministry is always a ministry to the Lord. Our true service is always that of serving the Lord.

We've got to keep this in mind whenever we minister. We haven't been called to please men, we've been called to please the Lord. Paul said, If I seek to please all men, then I'm not a servant of Christ.

I need to be more interested in God's approval than I am man's applause. So many times we get in a trap in the ministry and we look for recognition from man. We look for their approval.

And we forget that in reality what we should be chiefly concerned about is what does God think of my ministry? What does God think of what I have done? For that which is highly esteemed of man is often not esteemed at all by God. And so in looking at my service I must always realize that behind it all I am serving the Lord. Thus I look to the Lord for the rewards of service, not looking to man for the rewards of service.

I look to the Lord for the directions for my service rather than looking at man for the directions for my service. There are many people who feel that God has shown them exactly how Calvary Chapel should be run. And they come and tell me how wrong we are in some of the things we're doing.

And this is what we ought to be doing. And if you don't start doing it this way we're going to go to another fellowship. And I say if you go to Romaine he'll suggest some fellowships for you.

It's not that I'm not open to suggestions. I prayerfully consider each suggestion that is brought to me, but I never respond to the suggestion. I always seek the direction from the Lord.

Now I've been given some excellent suggestions. I've prayed about them and the Lord said that is right. You should do it.

But I always reserve that privilege of seeking the Lord for the directions for the ministry. Because in reality we are serving Him. But in serving the Lord we are also serving men because the Lord has told us that we should serve men.

He has told us that we are to go. He has told us that we are to give. He has told us that we are to love.

And so in serving Him I have to go the second mile. In serving Him I have to give to Him who asks of me. In serving Him I have to love even as He loved me.

And so the service unto man is in reality a service unto God. It is that which God has commanded me to do for men. But really serving man can sometimes be sort of a bummer.

You can really sort of grind under this. I think one of the most unpleasant tasks that I have is picking up cigarette butts around here. I just don't like it.

I've tried to find, you know, search within myself and find out why I have such a horrible aversion to picking up cigarette butts. And I've come to the conclusion that it goes way, way back to my early childhood. Because from the time I was just a littlest guy my mother used to always say to me, son never touch a cigarette.

Never touch a cigarette. And every time I reach down to pick up a cigarette butt I think, oh, oh, I'm disobeying my mom, you know. She told me never to touch those things.

And I find that I hate to touch them. But a lot of people come to weddings here on Saturday and, you know, they're going to church and they're nervous. They've got to get braced to go into church.

And so they'll smoke right up to the door, you know, and then they'll toss the cigarette down and they'll squeeze it, you know, they'll twist their foot on it and it makes it harder to pick it up. And then they come on in, you know. Well, it's unsightly to have those cigarette butts out there in the patio.

And so I walk by and I see them and, you know, I start mumbling about litter bugs and air pollution and, you know, inconsideration and all. And as I'm sort of just muttering to myself, the Lord speaks to me and says, who are you picking that up for? Oh, some inconsiderate person that's in there. Lord says, no, who are you really picking that up for? I said, well, I'm picking it up for you, Lord.

It's your house. He said, what are you griping about then? Now, if you realize you're serving the Lord, even in such a dumb little thing as picking up cigarette butts, you're doing it for the Lord. You're doing it as unto the Lord.

It changes the whole thing. And I've actually come where I can whistle while I'm picking up cigarette butts. The Bible says, whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God.

Now, you're wise if you take that scripture and put it into practice and realize that whatever you do is a ministry unto the Lord. Rather than saying, I don't know why I have to clean up after that slob, he ought to be able to hang up his own clothes and all. You know, you realize, well, it's unto the Lord.

I'm really serving the Lord. And your kitchen sink can become your shrine of worship. You sound like you don't believe that.

Some of you fellows are having a tough time on the job. You feel the foreman sort of got it in for you. And going to work is just sort of a grind.

You find yourself really chaffing under it. Hey, whatever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of the Lord. Say, hey man, I'm not serving you.

I'm serving the Lord. I'm going to do this as unto the Lord. Not as a man pleaser, but I'm going to do this as unto the Lord.

For I am God's servant and whatever I do, I'm doing for God. I'm doing for the glory of God. Whatever I'm doing in word or deed, do all to the glory of God and it can change the complexion of your whole situation.

It can cause it to turn into a joyful experience thinking, Lord, I'm doing this for you. You know, I have done some of the rottenest things for the Lord. But the fact that I do them for Him makes them bearable.

There are some things that would be totally unbearable if I weren't doing them for the Lord. Things that would just absolutely have made me totally sick. But I'm doing them for the Lord and He gives me the grace and the strength and the ability to do it.

Because Lord, hey man, I wouldn't do this for myself, but I'll do it for you. And working and doing things as unto the Lord makes a glorious joy to every task, really. It gives sort of a halo to every activity as I serve the Lord.

Now this is what I must keep in the back of my mind. In all of my service, it is really serving the Lord. That's the true ministry is that of serving the Lord.

And so Paul said, you know how I was with you in all seasons and so forth? Serving the Lord with all humility of mind. Now one of the greatest dangers in serving the Lord is that of being exalted and lifted up in yourself. It's one of the greatest traps.

More ministers have been destroyed by this business of becoming a haughty and filled with pride. It is such a destructive thing. But it's possible that it can happen to any of us who serve the Lord.

Maybe your neighbor is sick and so you fix a bowl of soup and you take it over to them. And they say, oh, that's so kind of you. You're just the greatest neighbor anybody could ever have.

Oh, I'm so glad to have you in the neighborhood here. I wish everybody in the neighborhood were as lovely as you are and as sweet as you are. And you begin to think, well, I guess I am pretty lovely and pretty sweet, aren't I? You know.

And you start getting a little haughty and all of how sweet I really am and what a wonderful neighbor I am. And you start getting lifted up in these things. But Paul says serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

It's a tragedy when ministers become so important that they don't have time for individuals. But you know, it's interesting how that God always has a way of keeping you humble. He has his ways of just sort of putting you in your place.

Keith Ritter told how that one Wednesday night here when he was ministering to the believers meeting, there was just a neat, neat, one of those services where everybody is just blessed. And, you know, it's just one of those neat flowing kind of experiences. And Keith was thinking, oh, man, I really, you know, tonight just really did it, you know.

And just began, started to leave the platform to go down and just really, you know, mingle with the people because it was such a marvelous, you know, moving of the spirit. And he was such an instrument of God. And as he started down, he slipped and he fell on his face right down here on the floor.

And I'll tell you, that's a humbling experience to look up at the people from that position. And the Lord just sort of takes, you know, the whole wind out of your sails. Yeah.

Or when you're up here after the third service, you've been standing before the people, then you go out the patio and you're shaking hands with everybody and greeting them, you know, and getting, you know, the feedback from the people. And someone comes up and says, Pastor, your zipper's down. Oh, what a wipe out, you know.

Now, the Lord said, he that exalteth himself shall be abased. Much better that you don't exalt yourself. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

The Bible says, let every man esteem others better than himself. And then Paul goes on to talk about the ministry. And he said, with many tears.

It is so important in the ministry that we really be truly sensitive to the needs of others. That we weep with them in their sorrows. That we genuinely share with them in their trials.

That we weep with them over their failures. And really, many tears I've shed for my own failures. There are many times when I feel that I have just totally failed the Lord when standing before you.

I have taken a scripture that is so filled with truth and potential and all, and I feel like I've totally mishandled it. I just, somehow, it just wasn't there and it just didn't come out. And there was so much that could have been, but just didn't somehow come together.

And I go back and I just weep. And I think, oh God, how I've failed. To really represent you and bring thy truth to the people.

Lord, I just am such a failure. Weeping over my own failures, over my own inability. Serving the Lord with tears.

Actually, there's a scripture that says that they that go forth with tears bearing precious seed shall no doubt come again bringing their sheaves with them. Oh, the attitude in which I go out is so important. The attitude in which I go out to do the work of the Lord.

There was a young fellow just out of seminary who was filling his first pastorate. And he had all of the background and the seminary training and all of the self-confidence that one becomes imbued with in this kind of an education. And as he came forth before this new congregation to minister the word of God, he was just, everything was just perfect.

The collar was, or the cuff was showing just the right distance under the sleeve. And he, his diction, everything was just so perfect. And of course, it was, you know, he just came out and had every, he had his act together, just everything was right, you know.

But as he tried to minister to the people, it just wasn't there. He just, in a sense, fell flat on his face in his attempt to communicate God's truth to these people to the extent that he finally just broke down and began to weep, closed the book and walked off weeping. When a dear old saint down in the front row said, if he had come in like he went out, he would have gone out like he came in.

Going forth with tears bearing precious seed. Then Paul says with temptations. Now that word temptations is actually persecutions or trials or testings.

As Paul was ministering, he was always being persecuted. He speaks of here the persecution arising out of the Jews who actually were going around resisting his ministry wherever he went. But yet with tears, he

was ministering to them in spite of the persecutions that were going on.

You would think that if a person was going around doing good and seeking to help people and share the love of God that they would just be so warmly received wherever they went. But not so. Jesus said, if they haven't received me, they're not going to receive you.

The servant isn't any greater than his Lord. If they haven't listened to me, they're not going to listen to you. If they haven't accepted me, they're not going to accept you.

Serving the Lord in spite of the obstacles, in spite of the persecution, serving him. Then Paul goes on to say, holding back nothing that is profitable unto you. How that as a minister, you can't hold back.

You've got to give until you have nothing else to give. Holding back nothing that is profitable to the people. Giving whenever possible to help their physical needs.

Giving to help them in their emotional needs. Giving to help them in their spiritual needs. Never holding back, but always giving freely all that you have in order to minister and to help others as you serve the Lord.

Then Paul said, showing unto you. He said, for I have showed you. You know, the most powerful lessons are those that we can see, not those that we hear.

There is a tremendous value in the demonstration of truth. People learn far more from what they see than they learn from what they hear. And your life should always be a reflection of your teaching.

And so Paul speaks about his ministry to them, was that of demonstrating, showing unto you. And that should always be the case in our ministry. Our lives should be a practical demonstration of that which we are declaring.

If we say to people, God wants you to love your neighbor, then we should love our neighbor. If we say, God wants you to be forgiving, then we should show forgiveness. God wants you to be generous and kind, then we need to show the generosity and the kindness.

We've got to demonstrate. And that's where many ministries fall down. There isn't the practical demonstration of the truths that are being proclaimed.

And thus Paul speaks of his ministry, and the true minister is not one who just tells people how to live. He's one who shows people how to live by the example of his own life. Living before them, showing them, demonstrating to them how they are to love, how they are to forgive, how they are to serve the Lord.

And then Paul said, and I have taught you. Where did he teach them? He says, well, I have taught you in public places and from house to house. Taught you publicly, and I've taught you from house to house.

There are a lot of people that really, they dig that public ministry. They don't care so much for the house to house. They like the idea of standing before great multitudes, but they sort of shy away from an individual ministry.

God help us. The day you become so important that you can't minister to an individual, you've become more important than your Lord, who always was willing to take time for the individual and to minister to individual needs. And so he said, I've taught you publicly, and I've taught you in your homes from house to

house.

Going around the individual instruction and exhortation to a brother. What did Paul teach them? He said, I have taught you that you should turn to God and that you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he went on to say that he did not count his own life dear to himself.

Now, actually, to really serve the Lord, you can't count your life dear to yourself. You have to be willing to make sacrifices of your own time, of your own resources, of yourself, maybe even of living standards. You know, Satan, when he was before God, accused Job of serving God for the material benefits.

He said, look at the way you have blessed him. Anybody would serve you if they were blessed like that. Don't tell me Job's such a big guy and doing so good.

You've prospered him and blessed him. No wonder he's serving you. And he was accusing Job of serving the Lord for the monetary gain or for the material gain.

Now, there are many times people today are trying to make the same innuendos that we are serving the Lord for material gain, that we might live in a nice home, that we might drive a nice car, and Satan's accusations are still prevalent. Attributing false motivations towards the ministry. I thank God for the first 17 years of my ministry that no one can make false accusations against me saying that I ministered to the Lord or I ministered for the material gains because for 17 years, I'll tell you, we sacrificed and did without.

My wife and I were just relating to each other this week how glorious it is, the way God has blessed us now. We're so thankful. We were remembering the day when buying a can of Crisco was a major problem in our budget.

We'd have to figure out what we can do without this week. We have to buy a can of Crisco, you know. That it was just, it was a major disaster in the grocery budget.

It would just wipe us out. How that when we took our second pastorate in Tucson, our first pastorate was in Prescott. We got \$15 a week.

The second pastorate, we got a raise in salary. We were getting \$20 a week. And they gave us a parsonage, which was one big room behind the church.

We put a curtain up to separate our bedroom from the living room because people were always coming into the parsonage. It was right there at the church. We came to church early tonight.

I thought we'd come back and say hi, you know. And you're trying to get ready. We had to brush our teeth.

Our kitchen sink was actually a dish pan. And we had a faucet coming through a hole in the wall. No hot water, just the cold water.

We'd have to heat our hot water on a big, old-fashioned stove with a high-top oven and the burners. And you brush your teeth, you know. And you want to brush your teeth before church.

And people would come. Well, you'd have to go over to church and get the glass full of water. And you'd take your toothbrush and you'd go outside and you'd spit the water out in the yard because we didn't have any drain or anything back there.

We had to use the restrooms in the church, which were up at the front end of the church on the cold winter nights. That was tough. We had to go to a neighbor's house to get a bath.

And we lived back there just as happy as if we'd had good sense. Because we were serving the Lord and that was our desire. That was our life.

We wanted to serve the Lord more than anything else. And if serving the Lord meant living behind the church in that big room and getting \$20 a week, praise the Lord. We were happy to be serving the Lord.

And thus, for 17 years, we lived in great sacrifice of many things because we were serving the Lord. I worked, laboring with my own hands to provide for the needs of the family. All kinds of jobs in order to provide for the family's needs in order that I might stay in the ministry.

I used to get calls all hours of the night. They'd say, Chuck, we have a body to go pick up. I used to get \$5 a body.

That was great because that meant that we could maybe have meat tomorrow. And we'd praise the Lord. I'd get up and get dressed and go out and pick up the bodies and just really rejoice that God was providing for the needs of the family.

Well, you know, they're going to die anyhow, so you might as well rejoice. Someone's got to pick them up. And so Paul the Apostle, speaking of the ministry, says not counting our own lives dear.

In other words, I'm not looking for the soft life, not looking for the easy way, not looking for the comforts. Don't count our own lives dear. Well, I'm too good to do that.

Well, I'm too good to live there. Well, I'm too good to drive that kind of a car. But serving the Lord, what difference does it make what kind of a car I drive, where I live? I'm serving the Lord.

I don't count my own life dear. I'm nothing special. The Lord, He's the one that's special.

Paul said that I might finish the course with joy. Now, Paul looked at life as a race course that was set before him. And he wanted to finish that race, but he wanted to finish it up in front.

He said, know ye not that they which run a race, everyone runs, but only one receives the prize. So run that you might obtain. He later wrote to Timothy, and he said, I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, our righteous judge, shall give.

And so that I might finish the course with joy, knowing that I've done the work that God has called me to do, knowing that I've been faithful unto the Lord, now there remains for me that glorious reward as I go to receive the reward from the Lord for the things that I've done while in this body. That I might receive from Him that glorious approval. As he says, well done, thou good and faithful servant.

Oh, the joy that awaits me when I have finished the course. And that's the way I want to run the race, that when I finish the course, I can stand before the Lord and say, Lord, I did my best. Finish the course with joy.

And then he said, that I might finish the ministry I have received from Jesus. The Lord has called each of us to a ministry. It should be the purpose of our lives to finish or to complete that ministry to which God has called us.

And as I said, your ministry may be at a lay, it may be at a desk, it may be behind the counter, it may be at the kitchen sink, but God has a ministry for each of us and your life is His, you are His servant, you are serving the Lord, you belong to Him, and the Lord is going to reward you for your service. And if God has called you as a mother and a housewife, then rejoice in it. Do your best to show by example to your children that love of Jesus Christ, that kindness and mercy and grace of God, that you might live before them in such a way that as they grow up, they'll want to follow your faith and your walk with God.

Showing and teaching and admonishing and fulfilling and finishing the ministry that God has called us to. That when I lay down the Bible, having preached my last message, and the Lord says, Okay, Chuck, that's it. All right, Lord, let's get on.

The joy of having served Him and now the eternal joy of reigning with Him. Oh, what a blessed hope we have and how marvelous it is, the privilege of serving the Lord. Shall we pray? Father, we ask that you would help us today to more fully understand our place of ministry within the body.

And we thank you that you've called each of us for a special place and a special ministry. Lord, may we serve thee with gladness of heart, with a cheerful spirit. Whatever we do, Lord, may we do as unto thee for thy glory.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. And now may the Lord be with you and may He bless you throughout this entire week.

May the anointing of the Spirit rest upon your life as you serve the Lord in your various places of ministry. And may that consciousness of service to Him lighten every experience of your life, put a holy sort of glow about all that is done because it's for Him. I am His servant.

I am serving the Lord. And may the joy of the Lord become your strength and your portion as He leads and guides and strengthens you for the things that you'll be facing this week. God bless you.

God guide and keep you in the love of Jesus Christ.

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