

The Servant God

by David Gooding

David Gooding emphasizes the importance of understanding God as a servant and encourages Christians to embody this servanthood in their lives.

Duration: 41:35

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of being a servant and serving others. He highlights that Jesus, in his final hour, sets an example of servanthood by washing the disciples' feet. The speaker emphasizes that Christians should be known for their willingness to serve, even in difficult circumstances. He also mentions that God's response to the world's opposition is laughter, and that God has already installed his king who will reign forever. The sermon concludes with a call to grasp the concept of servanthood in our own lives and in the context of offering mobilization.

Transcript

Well, thank you very much indeed, Catherine. It's great to be here. It's great to work with George.

It's always refreshing to work with George Berwer. We talk to each other on the telephone most times, many, many times in a week. And it's never boring to receive a telephone call from George.

It could be many other things, but it's never boring. Unfortunately, I have to leave tomorrow. We have our India leaders' meeting starting next week in Hyderabad.

Whilst you're meeting here, you might just have the opportunity to have a wee prayer for us as we meet there. I don't know what your mental image of God is. What picture comes into your mind when you think of God? You think of an individual in a robe.

And his hands pushed deeply into the pockets of the robe. And he has a frown on his face and he's looking at you. And he's saying, not bad, maiden.

Haven't had a bad year. But it could have been so much better. Only if that's your mental image of God.

Do you ever think of God in shorts? Or is he always in a robe? That's one of the questions Chuck Swindell asks in this book, *Grace Awakening*. How many of you have not read this book? Absolutely incredible. You're a total failure, though, eh? It is possible to be a Christian and not have read this book.

But it probably means you're totally backslidden. So we all must hope that you'll go to the book table and purchase your copy of the Grace Awakening. It'll change your view of God.

And the moment your view of God is changed, your whole life is changed, is one question. Many of you pray prayers and you feel you don't have those prayers answered. So do I. Where then is this God of grace? Well, Ron Dunn's written this fabulous book, When Heaven is Silent.

What's actually going on when it appears God is not answering our prayers? I wonder how the people of St. James Church in Cape Town felt. They were at prayer, they were at their worship service. And a terrorist came.

And you remember the story of how many people were killed and many fearfully wounded by those terrorists. Frank Latif, the pastor of that church, great friend of Operation Mobilization, wrote this book, Tragedy to Triumph. Not only telling you the story of the incident, but more importantly the lessons learned through the incident.

And when you've read those three books, let me introduce you to a really super little study book. Some of you will have read Peter Lewis's book, The Glory of Christ. This is follow up on the Lord's Prayer.

It's thinner than The Glory of Christ, so that might encourage some of us. It's what? Thinner. Not as... It's an excellent little book, really opening up this prayer that we know so well.

Just four of the fabulous books available on this book table. But start by repenting and buying The Grace Awakening. Now let's turn to the book which is more important than all of those put together.

The Bible. Philippians Chapter 2. We're going to study John 13, but we're going to read Philippians 2. And I'm going to read from verse 5 to 8, and I invite you to follow in your own language. Philippians 2, verse 5. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you that when we open this book and your Spirit works in our lives, you speak to us through the words of this book. And Lord, we want to hear your voice tonight.

We don't just want to listen, but we want to understand. And we want to be able to apply your Word to our lives today. And we don't want to be able to respond to what you say tonight.

In such a way that our lives will bring more praise and more glory to your name. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

So verse 5. Last night we were thinking of the greatness of God. God who made the universes through the word of His mouth. Let there be light, He spoke out, and there was light.

What a great God. Look at His greatness with me for a moment in Psalm 2. I just want you to look at the first few verses. You won't read them, but let me tell you the story behind these verses.

Verse 1 tells us of nations raging against God. Verse 2 tells us that kings and rulers are conspiring against God. And that's happening all over the world, isn't it? Nations trying to destroy the Christian faith.

Kings and rulers doing their worst against the God of heaven. And sometimes we can get a bit worried by it all, can't we? But look at how God responds to the very worst that man can bring against Him. Look at verse 4. He who sits in the heavens laughs.

That's how God responds to the very worst this world can put against Him. It just brings laughter from the throne of God. And then God speaks, verse 5. And what does He say? Well, look at verse 6. I have installed my king.

Past tense. What all these people and nations are trying to stop. God has already done.

His king is reigning. And no one, no power will ever bring him down. Are those just words in a book? Or is that reality in everyday life? Dr. Howard Norrish was telling us on Sunday morning about the land of Iran.

He was telling us of his disappointment, even his anger, when the Shah was removed and the Ayatollah took his place. What was God doing? Who was in control? And he told us that the church in Iran has grown 10,000% since the Ayatollah was put in charge of the nation. Not just the statement of God ruling in a book.

But God is ruling and reigning in reality on this planet. And tonight we're going to talk about the servant God. What a ridiculous cycle.

Hagan must have flipped his head when he thought this one out. It's ridiculous, isn't it? God doesn't serve, does he? Gods are served by us, aren't they? I'll never forget being in Rio one Sunday morning. Looked out of the bedroom window and I looked up the many hills in that city.

It was still dark but you could see, I don't think I exaggerate when I say, thousands of little lights up the side of the hills. I went to investigate and all along the sides of the hills there were tablecloths with beautifully placed food on the tablecloths. The dogs were having a wonderful morning.

And these were the offerings to the spirits that the poor people of Rio were making. That's what you do with gods, isn't it? They don't serve you. You serve them.

The question always is, have I done enough? Have I brought enough? The incredible thing is that Hagan is right. That's incredible. But it's quite right that the great God of heaven has served and is serving us.

He has done everything for us. And in one sense there's nothing left to do. Just think of salvation for a moment.

This great God of heaven is incredibly angry about my sin. Does he demand that I pay the price? If so, what price is it? Can I ever offer enough? No, no, thank God. He deals with his own anger against my sin.

He pours out all that holy anger, not on me, but on his son Jesus. And I receive from this God who serves me in his son. And speaking of that act of Jesus at Calvary, God said this, My righteous servant will justify many people.

That's what was happening at Calvary. God was serving me and you. Incredible contrast.

The great God of heaven and earth is a servant God. Let's look at it together in John 13. We're going to read verses 12 to 17.

And again I just invite you to follow in your own language. And so when Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples and taken his garments and reclined at the table again, he said to them, Do you know what I've done to you? You call me teacher and Lord and you're right, for so I am. If I then the Lord and the teacher washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

But I give you an example that you should also do as I did to you. Truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you're blessed.

If you do them. Here in John 13 we reach an absolutely critical point in the ministry of Jesus. He tells us in verse 1 that his hour had come.

Back in chapter 2 at that wedding in Cana, his mother came to Jesus and said, Look, they're running out of wine. But Jesus said, Woman, my hour hasn't come yet. But now it has come.

That hour when Jesus was to depart out of the world to his father. What does Jesus do right at the beginning of this critical hour? It's very interesting to me that first by example and then by teaching, he shows the necessity of being servant. Because it's my conviction at the very heart of the Christian experience is this desire and willingness to serve.

How should Christians be known, identified in this world? Should they be happy? Not always. Should they have daily peace? No, not always. The great identification of the Christian should be that we've been delivered from the slavish desire to serve ourselves.

We've been released by the Holy Spirit into true freedom. And that's my freedom to serve you. Our freedom to serve one another.

Now many people are looking for freedom in this world. But they want to be free from all authority. They want to just do their own thing.

And that's not the freedom that Jesus is interested in. It's this glorious freedom from constantly needing to be served, released to be able to serve. Well let's examine this scene in John 13.

Jesus and his disciples are having supper together. Now remember they've been together very closely for three years. His disciples have been watching him.

They've been listening to his every word. But an absolutely astonishing thing happens at this meal. Proper etiquette taught that the guests should have their dinner.

Their dirty feet cleaned before they ate. A very humble, unpleasant task. Just go into any OM men's dorm and you'll smell why nobody volunteers for this task.

So they commence the meal. But no feet have been washed. Who's going to do it? You don't wash the feet of your equals.

You don't wash the feet of your peers. If we're not very careful, somebody's going to lose face here. And then there's a moment of high drama.

A moment which must have left every one of these disciples feeling really awful. Jesus rises from the table. He makes the necessary preparations.

He begins to wash the feet of his disciples. Just remind yourself of what's going on here. Who's washing whose feet? The feet being washed were those of some very ordinary human beings.

Fishermen, tax gatherers. Who's the foot washer? Well he's described in verse 3 of the chapter. He's the one who's come from God.

He's returning to God. He's the one in whose hands God has placed everything, according to verse 3. In a few days, from his own lips, these same disciples will hear these words. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.

A man who opened the eyes of the blind. And gave life to the dead. Washing the dirty feet of his disciples.

These disciples were just not willing to serve one another. Not willing to lose face. But the Lord of Glory is perfectly willing to serve them.

Doesn't seem to be much idea of hierarchical structures here, does there? You ever heard a Christian saying, that's not my job, you know, it's beneath me? Because evangelicals wouldn't talk like that. But how many prove by their lifestyle that they think like that? Now Jesus tells us exactly why he did this for these disciples. And he had two reasons for doing it.

Look at them with me, first in verse 15. I'm giving you an example, says Jesus. You should do as I did to you.

Quite simply, Jesus is saying, if he takes this towel, I want you, brothers, to be like this. This is how I want you to live. I want you to be towel grabbers.

Constantly grabbing for that towel to serve. And if we don't live like this, what are we actually saying? Well, look at verse 14. If I, your Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet.

If I refuse to live like this, I'm really saying that in some way I'm superior to my Lord and Master. I'm not willing to do that which Jesus, the Son of God, was perfectly willing to do. I'd love you to go away from this conference with this picture in your mind.

Picture of the Lord of the Universe washing the dirty feet of his disciples. Because for me, it is fundamental to Christianity. You have that mental picture in your mind.

Underneath the picture, put these words. I am giving you an example. But there was a second reason for Jesus to do this.

It was a symbolic act. Jesus is cleansing their dirty feet with water. Very soon, he'll be cleansing their dirty lives by the shedding of his blood.

That's why Jesus says to Peter in verse 7, What I do, you don't realize now, but you will understand later. This foot washing was symbolic of the greatest act of service to God. The greatest thing this planet has ever witnessed.

Calvary. Now I want you to make the link between John 13 and Philippians 2. We've heard a challenge from Jesus tonight. I have given you an example.

Now let's look at a similar challenge from Paul. Chapter 2 of Philippians in verse 5. Have this attitude in yourselves, says Paul, which was also in Christ Jesus. Other translations put it like this.

Have this mind among you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Sometimes when a person does something we don't understand, we say, I wonder what was in his mind. Now that's the significance of this word here.

It's a very special passage, Philippians 2. What was in the mind of Jesus when he went to the cross? A very strange thing to do, the Son of God going to the cross. What was in his mind? What was important to him at that point? This brief passage is so important because it answers those very questions. It explains the cross through the eyes of Jesus.

First of all in verse 6 you're told something that was not important to Jesus at this time. Two things were of no consequence to him at this moment. One was position.

And the other was power. You see, he existed in the form of God. But he didn't regard equality with God something to be grasped after.

In verse 7 he emptied himself. Verse 8 he made himself nothing. Now Jesus is about to be treated as a common criminal.

He's about to endure unbelievable physical torture. And because of this position of being equal with God because of this power, the power of God he does not have to suffer these things. If he holds on to his rights at this moment he will be delivered from all of this suffering.

But his rights are not the thing which are important to him. Look at verse 7. He takes the form of a bond servant. From heaven you came, helpless babe.

Entered our world, your glory veiled. Not to be served, but to serve. Position, power, rights were not important to him.

What was important to him was the opportunity to serve both his father and you and me. Now very briefly, let's just look at the rest of the chapter. Jump onto verse 17.

Because Paul does something really bold here. He goes from the example of Jesus to his own example. He said Jesus poured out his life Verse 17, I'm being poured out, just like a drink offering.

Before you offered a sacrifice to the gods in these days you poured wine over the sacrifice. And Paul is saying, that's a picture of my life. I'm pouring it out.

I'm not desperately trying to hold on to things. I'm giving myself, I'm pouring myself out. Just pause for a moment.

And honestly examine your own life. Is that a picture of your life? Pouring your life out. What's my life characteristic? Is it service? Or selfishness? You can be selfish in many, many ways.

Selfish with your possessions. With your time. You can also be very selfish with your spiritual gift.

What God has given to you, you can use to make yourself very comfortable. Or you can pour out your life. And you can serve others and you can minister to others with your gifting.

Selfishness or service, what are we going to do with our lives, brothers and sisters? Jim Packer writes about hot tub religion. Hot bath religion. Warm bath religion.

People who want their religion to serve them. A religion which leaves them feeling all comfortable and pleasant. But never forget, we are following the man who grabbed for the towel.

We are following the man who embraced the cross. When he had no need, humanly, to do that. Now tragically, many, many Christians never lived this way.

Let's move on to verses 19 to 24 of the chapter. When Paul wrote this epistle, his trial at Rome had finished. But the verdict wasn't announced yet.

And Paul wanted to get the message of the verdict as soon as it was announced around his supporting church. It's hard to believe, but they didn't have e-mail. So he's trying to get some messengers.

Volunteers from the Roman church who carry the news. But look at verse 21. They all seek after their own interests.

Not those of Jesus Christ. Timothy couldn't find one volunteer. Selfishness was ruling.

No sign of service. But there was one man who stood out. Head and shoulders above the rest.

His name was Timothy. He said, verse 19, I'm going to send him to you. Verse 20, I've got no one else of kindred spirit.

In many ways, Timothy was the last person you would expect to volunteer in this way. He seemed to have some physical weaknesses. He had stomach troubles.

The water wasn't very good, so Paul said, take a bit of wine. He seemed to be emotionally fairly needy as well. God had to say to him, Timothy, God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity.

Naturally, this was the kind of man who could really have turned in on himself. And put himself first. But he'd understood the heart of Christianity.

And he was willing to pour out his life. Now, there's one other fascinating example in the chapter. And as you're still awake, I'll take the liberty of showing it to you.

The final example is Epaphroditus. He was a member of the church in Philippi who'd been sent by the church to minister to Paul in Rome. And on the journey, he became so sick, he almost died.

Look at verse 26. He was longing for you all. And was distressed because you heard he was sick.

Now think about that for a moment, it's quite fascinating. Epaphroditus got sick. And somehow the word got back to Philippi, I don't know how, that he was sick.

And then the word got all the way back from Philippi to Rome that they were very distressed that he was sick. The bush telegraph was working well. And Epaphroditus is distressed that they are distressed through his distress.

And the Bible tells us he's in agony, that's the word which is used, he's in agony when he hears that they are concerned about him. The Greek word used there is only used on one other occasion in the New Testament. It uses the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

Very, very strong word. Epaphroditus is not concerned about his own health now. That's not number one any longer.

He wants to pour out his life for others. Well, how do you live like this? I think we'd all like to live like this. How do you live like this? Well, let's just go back to John 13 and find the secret before we close.

The secret of this kind of life is seen in verse 3 of the chapter. Let me read it to you. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things to his hands, that he'd come forth from God and was going back to God.

What was the secret? Jesus knew who he was. We find doing these lowly tasks, these serving duties so difficult because we wonder, what's it going to do to my image? What will they think if they see me doing toilet cleaning? That doesn't present the image of the dynamic Christian worker, does it? I should be behind the pulpit. Or behind the big desk in the office.

Not behind the sweeping brush. Not behind the sink washing dishes. Who are you? Who am I? We are sons, daughters of the almighty God.

We've been adopted into his family. What else do you want by way of status? I have nothing, brothers, to prove. You have nothing to prove.

You are totally accepted by the God of heaven. Not just as a servant, but a son and a daughter. Now when you're sure of who you are, secure with your relationship with God, you'll find a tremendous relief in your life from all kinds of other insecurities.

Insecurity. And you'll find yourself much more able to serve. You won't be constantly needing to make a name for yourself in every situation.

Because you're rejoicing in your name, child of God. That's the secret. Let me just make one final point.

Jesus moves on from washing these dirty feet. To speak of Judas, the one who would betray him. In verse 30 of the chapter you have another moment of high drama.

And Judas leaves the supper table to carry out his despicable task. So that's what we've got here, brothers and sisters. Not just the son of God washing the feet of his disciple.

But the son of God washing the feet of someone he knew would go right from this scene to betray him. If you look at verse 2, you'll find that this act of betrayal was in the mind of Judas, even as his feet were being washed and he was eating his food. It's comparatively easy to serve those who serve you, isn't it? It's quite easy to serve those who respond with gratitude to your acts of service.

But I'm called to go further than that. I am called to grab for that towel even when people mistreat me. I'm called to grab for that towel even when people don't respond with gratitude.

This is a mind-blowing picture for me. I really ask God to help me grasp it in my life. And if we could grasp it in operation mobilization, what a beauty there would be in our movement.

Fix the picture in your mind. There's Judas. In his heart he's thinking about the act of betrayal.

Jesus knows what's in his heart. And he takes that towel. And he washes his dirty feet.

And brothers and sisters, underneath the picture are written those words. I have given you an example. This is how you are to live.

And to refuse to do so is to say that in some way you are considering yourself to be greater than the Master. This is our God. The Servant King.

He calls us now to follow Him. Let's be faithful followers. Amen.

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