

## **The Story – The Very Nature Of A Servant**

We have spent the entire summer months looking at the life of Jesus. We began in June with the story of his baptism, the inauguration of his public ministry. We talked about his power and authority, that he was and is Lord over nature, the master of the storm. He is master over evil spirits, master of provision, meeting our needs, master over sickness and disease and he is the master and lord over death itself. We talked about some of his parables: the lost son, the unmerciful servant, the widow crying for justice, the good Samaritan and finally the sower and the soil. We then talked about some unique encounters of Jesus, like healing and forgiving the sins of the paralyzed man whose four friends brought him to Jesus. We talked about his improbable encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well and last Sunday we talked about his forgiveness of the woman caught in adultery.

The master over nature, sickness, demons and even death. A prophet and teacher who kept the law perfectly and yet showed mercy to sinners, forgiving their sins. All of these things brought the disciples to the conclusion, uttered by Peter, that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God! They were correct. Jesus was and is God in flesh. The Apostle's creed we studied some time ago states we believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, and descended into Hades. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." What we call the Nicene Creed gives us greater clarity as to the true nature of Jesus. It says, **"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end."** Nicene Creed (written in the late 300's as a result of two church councils).

The wording, “God of very God, Light of very Light, being of one substance with the Father,” was to show that Jesus as the Son is not in any way less than God. He is one with the Father, begotten, because that is the way the Scripture describes the union, but there was never a time that the Son was not with the Father. God of very God, that is his nature, and yet one so great and so glorious, humbled himself and was made in flesh for us and for our salvation. It is incredible to realize what he has done for us, taking upon himself the very nature of a servant. Redemption itself is wrapped in flesh and delivered to us. The redemption story and all we’ve studied about Jesus is wrapped up in the nature of Jesus. I want us to look at something interesting about his nature. Turn to Philippians 2. Paul writes, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death upon a cross!” Philippians 2:5-8** Let’s look at this for a moment.

He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Although he was God in flesh, he didn’t use force to convince or persuade people. Think about it: he could have overpowered everyone, forcing everyone to believe and repent, terrorizing people into right behavior and response, but that isn’t the nature of Jesus. He could have used an army of angels to convert everyone but he didn’t. He didn’t take advantage of who he was as God to use it in his own interests, instead, he emptied himself, made himself nothing, took the very nature of a servant to become one of us so he could offer himself as a ransom in our place. He was God, but didn’t use his power to take advantage of us but rather to serve us and give his life for us.

Power can be a dangerous thing and Jesus chose not to grasp for it. Let me read you something Henri Nouwen wrote in his book *In The Name of Jesus*. “When I ask myself the main reason for so many people having left the church during the past decades...the word ‘power’ easily comes to mind. One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave into the temptation of power – political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power – even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but emptied himself and became as we are. The temptation to consider power an apt instrument for the proclamation of the Gospel is the greatest of all...

**What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power**

**offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life. Jesus asks, ‘Do you love me?’ We ask, ‘Can we sit at your right hand and your left hand in your Kingdom?’ (Matthew 20:21) Ever since the snake said, ‘The day you eat of this your eyes will be open and you will be like gods, knowing good from evil’ (Genesis 3:5) we have been tempted to replace love with power. Jesus lived that temptation in the most agonizing way from the desert to the cross. **The long painful history of the Church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led. Those who resisted this temptation to the end and thereby give us hope are the true saints.**” ...Henri Nouwen**

Paul says we are to have this same attitude, this same mind and perspective. We want to use every advantage for our own sake, to better ourselves, but Jesus uses every advantage for the sake of others. We too often want to choose power and control rather than choosing service and love. Lord help us to have this same attitude as Jesus, to empty ourselves in behalf of others!

He made of himself nothing, i.e. he made of himself no reputation. Jesus wasn't worried about what anyone thought of him, that's why we found him talking to that Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, why he ate with sinners and called liberal tax collectors and conservative Zealots to follow him. **He didn't come to build a reputation, he came to give himself as a ransom to redeem us from our slavery to sin!**

He took upon himself the very nature of a servant, made in human likeness. He didn't just look like a human or appear as a human, he was both fully human and fully God. He is the king of kings and yet it was his very nature to be a servant. Jesus said, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** **Mark 10:45** This is who he is and that led him to humble himself and be obedient to the Father's redemptive plan to the point of dying upon the cross for us!

This is the nature of Jesus revealed to us in Paul's theology. Stop and think about it for a moment. Of all the ways he could have come, of all the examples and models he could have portrayed for us, he chose to be in very nature a servant. Not a king, not a ruler or governor, not an executive or a bureaucrat but a servant! This is the model he sets before us in every relationship. Now turn to **John 13:1-5** and let me show you his nature revealed to us in action.

It appears this is taking place just prior to the Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's supper. This is the evening before his betrayal and arrest. Jesus gathers with the disciples and John tells us Jesus knew the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. He loved his disciples and **"He now showed them the full extent of his love."** How would he show them the full extent of his love? Certainly he would do that in his death upon the cross and even in the sharing of the Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's supper. But I believe he wanted to show them the full extent of his love by teaching them once again what it means to love in the most practical, down-to-earth, daily sense of the word. Consequently, as the meal was being served, Jesus didn't go around the table and tell each one of them that he loved them and he had high hopes for each of them, with the one notable exception. He didn't call their name and wish them well. This wasn't love in theory. **"Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciple's feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."** John 13:4-5

Jesus showed them the full extent of his love by serving them. This is what he desired for the disciples. This is what he desires for us, that we learn to serve one another. Of course this isn't what most of us are planning, is it? You don't often hear "servant" mentioned in response to "what do you want to be when you grow up?" or "what are you planning to do upon graduation?" "I hope to find effective ways to be a servant to everyone I meet." "Well, good luck with that." But this is what Jesus modeled for us. It is certainly counter-cultural. We want to get a good job so we can have people serving us. But Jesus, knowing and understanding the culture, still told his disciples, **"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all."** Mark 10:42-44

We aren't to lord it over others. We aren't looking for ways to control people for our own benefit. We aren't grasping for ways to control, we are looking for ways to serve. The bible says, **"When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. 'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them. 'You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an**

**example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” John 13:12-17**

Do you understand what he has done for us? As Teacher and Lord he says he has set an example for us that we should do as he has done. He isn't telling us that every Sunday we should set aside a time in the service to wash each other's feet. For one thing, we don't all wear sandals and walk on dusty roads any longer. It was important in first century Jerusalem and it might be important in some other parts of the world today, but it isn't really necessary in Tulsa. But following his example of serving others? That is absolutely essential. It is like a living parable acted out before his disciples for our benefit. This is what he calls us to do. This is the example he places before us and this example is to effect and inform every relationship in our lives. This is how we are to approach our friends, our co-workers and classmates, our parents, our wife or husband. Every relationship is approached with the very nature of a servant. Our priority is not to be served, but like Jesus, to look for a way to serve and bless and help others.

Imagine if you approached every relationship in this manner. If every morning your first thought was “How may I best serve my wife or husband?” “How may I best serve my parents, my child, my boss, my co-workers?” What a different home, a different school or work place, what a different world it would be. Understand at the heart of this is love. Jesus was motivated by his love for his disciples. Love seeks the best for others. As servants of Jesus, following his example, we are looking to show the full extent of our love for others by acting in redemptive ways, seeking to help them discover God's will and God's best. As a husband I should be thinking, “How may I best serve my wife to help her experience God's best for her life today?”

I'm not talking about simply giving them whatever they want or desire. That may not be loving or in their best interest. We are serving in redemptive, loving ways. I'm not suggesting we lay down and become doormats for everyone else. Allowing ourselves to be coerced or manipulated into doing something for someone that is not in their best interest is not loving nor is it true servanthood in the style Jesus showed us. Gayle Erwin in his book *The Jesus Style* writes, **“There is a distinctive difference between coerced slavery and servanthood by choice...Love always chooses to do the right and serving thing for others – but it is a choice. You can only love by choice. True love cannot be the result of either decree, force or manipulation.”** Gayle Erwin

We are choosing to do the right thing, looking for the opportunity to serve others in love, helping them to become all God desires for them to become.

Jesus said, **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”** **John 13:15.** Later in John’s gospel Jesus said, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”** **John 20:21** How had the Father sent Jesus? He sent him to serve and to give his life for others. He sent him to wash feet and bless others. He sent him to redeem the lost and hurting and broken and Jesus says he is sending us in the same way. You see, **God’s redemptive story is to be lived out through the church – through the others centered, loving service of the church!** So here are three questions for all of us today. First,

**Where has God called you to serve?** Perhaps you’ve always wanted to make a reputation for yourself and God is calling you to an area of service where no one ever sees you, where you will never get the credit. As Paul said of Jesus, perhaps the Lord is calling you to make of yourself no reputation in service to Him!

**Whom has God called you to serve?** Jesus said the Pharisees looked to serve in ways that brought attention to themselves or benefited themselves, but perhaps God is calling you to serve people who can’t benefit you in anyway. They can’t repay you or serve you in return. Maybe he is calling you to work in the nursery or with children. Maybe he is calling you to work with the homeless, with John 3:16 Mission or another service agency in Tulsa. Maybe he is calling you to wash feet, to change diapers, to wait tables, to serve the least among us.

I quoted earlier from a book by Henri Nouwen. Some of you may have heard of him, the author of *The Wounded Healer* and a number of other books. He taught at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard but left in 1986 to work in a residential community that served mentally and physically challenged people. This renowned seminary professor and author chose to spend time literally washing the feet and bodies of the mentally and physically challenged. Whom has God called you to serve? Finally,

**Whose feet are you to wash?** Is it your spouse, a friend, an enemy, someone you’ve had issues with, someone you’ve struggled to forgive, someone outside your comfort zone? I’m not suggesting who it might be, I’m only asking you to heed the words of Jesus and accept his challenge. **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...No servant is greater than his master. John 13:15-16**