

United In Service

Mark 10:35-45
February 2, 2025

Say help. A wife was yelling at her husband about **not helping** her, “I’m cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, while you sit around all day waiting for me to bring you some iced tea. What kind of a husband are you?” A patient one, he said. His service will be next Monday. Today we’re going to talk about helping others. Please open your Bibles today to Mark 10.

We had a CBC Executive meeting Tuesday evening. Bro Grover shared a story from their recent trip where they met with 16 pastors from Venezuela. One of them told how many have left his city. They left children and the elderly behind and many children are now just wandering the streets, some with the same diaper for weeks. There is little food, sometimes none, sometimes only a handful. What are we to do for our Brothers and sisters? Stay tuned to find out what we did.

What is our theme this year? Unity! Our theme verse from John 17:23 is “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” Jesus’ prayers should be our goals. Repeat. And this is one of them. Say complete unity. The first Sunday we spoke about unity in Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. We followed that up by stressing the need for Unity in our beliefs. The Bedrock core doctrines taught in the Bible. I shared at the Business meeting Monday night about the main beam we found in the old basement that goes down the center under the old sanctuary from one end to the other. Sixty long feet, one single hand-hewn 8”x10” beam. Probably chestnut. With no splice. An amazing structural timber that has supported that old sanctuary and current fellowship hall for 157 years. It illustrates clearly for us how the church of Jesus Christ is built upon God’s Word. Still as strong and trustworthy as it was 2000 years ago when it was finished and still as reliable. You can put your full weight on it! The Bible too was laid in place by our spiritual ancestors and we do well not to notch it or compromise it with unbelief nor let the liberal termites chew it up. As we sang, on foundation of His promise, may we be forever united in belief.

Last week we talked about how unity in Christ and Unity in belief leads directly to unity in practice. How our beliefs **always** determine what we do. If we really believe in Jesus and really believe the Bible, we will obey and do what they say. We fleshed that out to examine some of those practices that unite us: baptism, Love Feast, Communion, study, giving, sharing, fellowship, etc. If you missed any of those sermons, I encourage you to go back and listen.

We are going to zero in on one of those practices today. Say service. This practice, like all the others, comes directly from God’s Word. To hear what Jesus said

about it, please stand if you are able as we read from Mark 10:35. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us **whatever** we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You **will** drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 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."

Oh the temptation of greatness. Of fame. Of position and power. Here we are only days before Jesus' crucifixion and His disciples, who are nearly graduates of His 3 year seminary still don't understand one of His core principles and values, one of His main support beams. They're still thinking and functioning in the world's system of power and influence. And they're jockeying for position. Perhaps they thought as they approached Jerusalem this was going to be time Jesus would overthrow the Romans and seize control and they wanted to get their names in His hat for the best positions in His cabinet. They didn't need the Senate to confirm them, just Jesus' say so. You never know till you ask, right? And so they ask. "Let us have the most powerful seats in your kingdom."

Nothing much. Just the most favored spots in the administration. Vice President and 2nd Vice President. This is after Jesus had told them **not** to seek the best seats for themselves. To be humble. Like us, they heard Him, but they didn't hear Him. They didn't internalize and try to live out what He had said. Most of us have been listening to Jesus for much longer than three years and still we don't get Him. Still we strive for power and position. Still we try to work the system to advance ourselves and get the best seats. Still we play by the world's rules. And still we try to tell Jesus what to do. "We want you to do for us whatever we ask." Instead of presenting requests and submitting to His wisdom and will.

Jesus' answer echoes down the centuries to us reminding us we don't know what we ask. We don't see His big picture. We don't know what's good for us and what's not. Foolishly they commit to drinking from Jesus cup. You better see what's in His cup before you ask for a sip. His cup is full of pain. It's full of misery, rejection, torture and crucifixion and it's a cup Jesus Himself will ask the Father not to drink. The book of Acts tells us that James did indeed drink of Jesus' cup when Herod put him to death. John

would also have his taste of Jesus' cup through torture and exile and attempted execution. Be careful what you wish for.

We can condemn James and John for their self-centered request but when the other 10 disciples heard about it, they **all** got very upset. Why? Because they were sorrowful over their fellow disciples' pride? No. Because they wanted those same seats and they were angry that these two beat them to it. They all had the same infection. And, by the way, so do we. Beware pride and selfishness. We're all infected.

Jesus, however, always teaching, used this teachable moment just days before His crucifixion to drive home one of His most important points. "Yes," He says, "This is the way the world operates. You got it down. This is the way politics work. This is the way Rome and Washington works. But my Kingdom is not in Rome or Washington, although some of my children do work and serve there. My kingdom is from above and the rules of engagement are different. The rules for advancement are not the same." You may know how to climb the ladder of success at your work or in the world, but Jesus has a different ladder.

And then, with great intensity, He looks deep into their eyes, perhaps pointing around to all in His circle of 12, and says, "Whoever wants to become great ... must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." That's the not the cup I want, Lord. Perhaps you misunderstood. I want the highest seat, not the lowest. I want to be Vice President, not dishwasher. I want to be Secretary of State, not secretary. "No," Jesus said, "That's just it. The slave of all **is** the greatest of all. The servant **is** the king. For even I didn't come to be served, but to serve." Jesus never asked His followers, then or now, to do something He didn't do. He has gone before us in all things. In death, in resurrection, and in service.

Then, giving the most powerful living illustration of this truth, a few days later, He took a towel and basin and stooped to wash His followers' filthy feet. We've heard the story so often it's lost its edge, but think of Donald Trump fixing a flat on his cook's car. Or Bill Gates changing a diaper for your grandmother. No. They've got more important things to do. Jesus says, "There are no more important things to do. You work your way to the top of my kingdom by serving at the bottom." The Mother Teresas who have never been recognized. The faithful who continue to serve in whatever position God has called them to in His church. You may not preach or teach or sing. You may not ever be recognized. You may clean tables or toilets at blast or wash dishes after meals. You may change bulbs or install screens. You are the greatest, Jesus says, in His kingdom. Your time of recognition has not yet come. But it will. Keep serving.

Jesus told His disciples He came to be a servant to all. As we mentioned last Sunday, all of us together are the sanctuary, the Body of Christ today. And if Jesus'

body **served** when He was here physically on earth, His physical body today, which is our church, should be **servicing** today on earth.

Service is in Brethren DNA. Perhaps because we unite in the practice of footwashing, we have been united in serving in other ways. In feeding the hungry and housing the homeless. In service professions of teaching and medicine. In practical assistance through pregnancy centers and yes, disaster response. Which makes our partnership with Samaritan's Purse so powerful. Historically, the Brethren were doggedly determined to be doctrinally true to God's Word. But that was never disconnected from living out those true teachings by serving others. We take the service of Foot Washing outside the church and live it out. Serving our families, our coworkers or classmates. Serving our communities like night to shine, and in our nation. To do what we can to alleviate suffering and bring health and wholeness and joy and Jesus to others. We strive to live the truth of our singing, living worthy of our calling.

James 2:15 tells us, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." We can have the best statement of faith ever, the best preaching and teaching ever, the best beliefs and the closest fellowship ever. But if we're not aren't serving others in need, James says our faith is dead!

So what about those children in Venezuela? CBC is very young and we are far from loaded, but we did designate some of what we do have to provide \$500 to each of those 16 pastors to use to feed their families and their communities. Yes, we want them to join CBC, but that's not even a consideration. There is human need and although we can't go into Venezuela right now, we can send money to those who are there. We couldn't all go to North Carolina, but we could all support those who did with our cash and if we didn't have that, then with our prayers. And as we do, we become united in service. There is something that really unites people who work and serve together.

Some of our youth are going to Puerto Rico in June to work on a school there. Many of the public schools in PR were destroyed by an earthquake in early 2020 and when Covid hit two months later, the government permanently closed many schools relocating students to larger towns. They also started teaching gender ideology to all students in all grades. The CBC Church in Bayamon asked their Mayor to give them the damaged school and he did. They have repaired it and it is now the Bethlehem school. They provide a K-12 Bible-based curriculum with accredited teachers. So we go and help them and we send our support. And if you like to drink from their cup of soup, you can support the trip through their fundraiser next Sunday or make a straight donation. United in service.

In Galatians 5:13, Paul tells us to, "...serve one another in love," and in 6:2 he says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will **fulfill the law of Christ.**" What law? The law of serving rather than being served. He told the Corinthian believers that he made himself a slave to everyone so that he could win as many as possible. As we unite in service to others, it becomes an evangelistic strategy. Not that we do it for that reason, we do it to glorify God, to obey Jesus, and to love our neighbor, but the byproduct of service is often salvation. When people see how you love them, they want Who you got.

Imagine the awards ceremony in heaven one day. All the great preachers get their awards, Billy Graham, Billy Sunday, Jonathan Edwards, etc. All the musicians. Bach, Isaac Watts, Fanny Crosby. All the famous saints, Mother Teresa, William Booth of the Salvation Army, Tim Tebow, etc. All the Sunday School teachers, the youth leaders, the disciples. And then Jesus says, I've saved the highest awards for last. Would the following individuals please come forward? And He begins to call the names of people we've never heard of. There's one we vaguely remember. We never saw her much except when she delivered a meal when we were sick. Some old man who could barely get around but who served others faithfully every day by praying for his family, his neighbors, his church, and his nation. A pastor in Venezuela who fed the poor and with him, someone from here who sent him money to do it. The greatest are those who serve.

We can't expect the world to adopt Jesus' value system. For all the talk about servant leadership, many leaders in government, business, education, and all too often, church, only serve themselves. Like James and John constantly maneuvering for the best seats. Even the most sincere Christians can deceive themselves, ourselves, into thinking we are serving others when we are really serving us. May we ask Jesus to clean our spiritual glasses that we may see us as we really are. And then to humble ourselves to serve Him and others.

The poet Charles Meigs put it this way:
Lord, help me live from day to day,
In such a self-forgetful way
That even when I kneel to pray,
My prayer shall be for—Others.

Help me in all the work I do,
To ever be sincere and true
And know that all I'd do for You,
Must needs be done for—Others.

Let Self be crucified and slain,
And buried deep: and all in vain
May efforts be to rise again,
Unless to live for—Others.

And when my work on earth is done,
And my new work in Heav'n's begun,
May I forget the crown I've won,
While thinking still of—Others.

Others, Lord, yes others, Let **this** my motto be,
Help me to live for others, That I may live like Thee.

Finally, today, we need to look at Jesus' last words in this passage. He says He came to serve **AND** to give His life as a ransom for many. Say ransom. A ransom is something paid to free hostages, usually innocent people who are doomed to die if the ransom is not paid. Ransom is most often demanded for someone kidnapped by a radical group trying to extort money and to expand their terror. Some of you remember back in the 70s when the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped Patty Hearst, granddaughter of the very wealthy newspaper tycoon, William Randolph Hearst. To fund their plans to overthrow the US government, they demanded \$4 million equal to \$25 million today. Patty began to cooperate with the SLA and even helped them rob banks. She claimed she was innocent because she had been brainwashed but she was found guilty and served time before President Carter pardoned her.

You and I had been kidnapped by Satan. But we were complicit. We went along with him and cooperated by sinning against God. The ransom was much higher than even \$25 million. It was blood and ours would be required if someone didn't pay. But Jesus did. He shed His innocent blood to pay our ransom. Your note is already paid in full. But you have to choose your freedom. Unlike Patty Hearst, we must stop making excuses, confess our sin and ask for a pardon, which Jesus has already purchased. Our price has been fully paid and we have to accept that gift to be free. If you never have, you're looking at the eternal death penalty: suffering forever in hell. Accept the gift that Jesus died to give you. Accept the ultimate act of service He did for others, for you in particular, when He died on the cross to restore and renovate not a flood damaged home in North Carolina, but a sin-ravaged life right here. Accept His ransom today and be saved!