

Servantship

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“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep.” Psalm 107: 23-24 The ship that is forever tied to the dock never sees the deep. It is in the depths that we see the greatest works and wonders of the Lord. Old-timers used to call the church the “old ship of Zion.” In the day a planes and bullet trains “ships” are often associated with recreation. It was not so long ago. In ancient times ships were the nautical “inter-net” that moved man across the face of the earth and formed a network of communication and progress. In Bible times, ships were not for “joy rides” but for journeys.

In the story of Jesus “stilling the storm” in Mark 4, I was always intrigued with the fact that “there were also with him other little ships.” Jesus and the twelve were in the most famous. It was in it that Jesus slept with his head on a pillow, but what is the significance of the “other little ships, with him?” I may never know more about them than Mark has told, but through my own Passage “unto the other side” (v.1) I have realized that there are other “little ships” in the Christian life that are “with him.”

In the following pages I shall attempt to share little lessons I have learned in the journey. Life is a journey. The Christian knows that Jesus is the only way. The first ship is not little at all. It is the flagship of this holy armada. It is Lordship. If the Christian does not understand its place in the fleet, he had better never leave shore. After Lordship there are other ships as well. There is worship, discipleship, leadership, fellowship, stewardship, partnership, and workmanship. Each of these other little ships is fashioned in the boatyards of Christian obedience. There are eight. Together they make up a sacred flotilla in faith. Each is made by him and for him, and like Peter’s little boat in Luke five, they are used by the Master for the “works” and “wonders” of his design. *“Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught”* (Lk. 5:4).

“ship” as a suffix comes from the ME. *Schipe* meaning to create, make or shape. It is usually added to nouns to denote 1) quality or condition of something as in friendship 2) status, office or rank of something as in Lordship 3) the ability or skill in something as in leadership. By Servantship I mean a quality of life, an office, and a skill. Therefore Servantship can be looked at in three different aspects. As a position, (that is the servant’s part), a condition, that is the servant’s heart), as a skill or an ability (that is the servant’s art). Servantship involves an admission, a position, a volition, and a submission.

The significance and importance of understanding Servantship is borne out when we consider that when God came into this world to save us and show us how to live, he came as a servant.

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Please understand that he could have come any way he wanted. He could have come in fiery chariots, with a million angels in sound and fury. He could have come draped in purple, upstaging the petty potentates of all earthly kingdoms. He had that right. He could have come in splendor and opulence. He opted to come in none of these ways. Instead, when God came into this world he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich. He even said that he came not to be served, but to serve. And in this lies the secret of the successful Christian life. We are saved to serve. *“And that [Jesus] died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again”* (1Cor. 5:15).

There is nothing we can do to rescue or redeem ourselves from sin, from its curse or its consequences. Salvation is not about what we do, but what Jesus did for us. At the same time, having been rescued and redeemed, there is nothing we would not do for Christ out of our eternal gratitude for his grace.

When the Prodigal son came to his senses (his spiritual senses, that is), he became an object lesson of grace and gratitude. The Bible says that he first “came to himself.” No one ever came to God except they first came to themselves. In his poverty and pitiful condition he realized that he did not like what he was (or what he had become). First he came to an important admission. *“I have sinned,”* he said. He put his finger on the problem. He had been thinking only of himself. “Give me,” he had said to his father “my inheritance.” This *“give me”* exposes the jagged rocks beneath the surface upon which many a ship has foundered and broken up. This *“give me”* points out the shallow waters upon which many a ship has run aground. The only remedy for this condition which always leads to spiritual catastrophe and ruin is conversion and the condescension of the soul in the spirit of servanthship. This realization (“I have sinned”) brought him to the very root of his troubles and to the very heart a troubled humanity. Sin and selfishness are in essence the same thing. One would not exist without the other. Sin, like the demon of Matthew 12 must have a host. Sin must find some “self” to attach itself to.

The Devil is not only *“going about like a roaring loin seeking whom he may devour,”* (1Pet. 5:8) he is more often, first, going about seeking whom he may empower. The operatic story of Faust is not far fetched. Satan’s method is still, first empower, then devour. *“All these things,” said Satan “will I give you if you fall down and worship me.”* Jesus immediately saw through the ploy. Jesus’ answer dealt with Lordship and with service. *“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”*

Christ did not waste words. He used the word “serve” as a synonym for “worship.” We worship what we love the most. What we love the most, we worship. Satan offered to “empower” Jesus. Notice how close this is to “empire.” Rome had an Empire. We do not have to look far to see who “empowered” it. This Empire as all other Empires stands in juxtaposition to God’s Kingdom. Remember how Satan wanted to “empower” Eve in the Garden of Eden. There was and is a high and hidden cost to such empowerment. The humanity of Christ was tested, and Christ teaches us early on in his ministry that one cannot serve two masters. When Satan offered “*all these things*” at a point of time in history, Greece had already fallen and the Roman Empire stood “empowered” on the summit.

Satan can only appeal to the sinful self. He appeals to our vanity, pride, arrogance, and appetites. Jesus had an appetite only for His Father’s will. “*I have bread to eat ye know not of.*” If we are not full of God and God’s things we are in danger of being filled with the devil’s things. “*Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*” Mat. 4:8-9.

Our generation was not the first to be asked “Who wants to be a millionaire?” Hands have been going up since Satan asked it in his own unique way in the Garden of Eden. Who wants to be as powerful as (a) God? “*Give me*” said the prodigal son before he left with what he thought was rightfully his, feeling empowered by the money in his purse.

Satan knows that man wants power. Man wants to break free from the authority of God and what they feel are the constraints of God’s word. They shed all that they feel restricts their freedom and think they are in “control” because they have spiritually “run away from home.” But like some fly caught in Satan’s spider web of sin, let every soul who has bargained with the Devil be sure of this, that while he may ignore you for now, he will be back to eat you later.

Satan’s offer of power was parried with a single thrust of the Sword of the Spirit, God’s Word. Although physically weak through fasting, Jesus would rely alone on the spiritual power of a son who “*always*” did those things that please the Father (Jn. 8:29). Had not the Spirit recently fallen upon and anointed him at the Jordan? Did not the voice of God affirm his initial public ordination through baptism with the words, “this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?”

Jesus would have none of Satan’s things. All offers of temporal glory were dim and dull to the One who was the light. But woe to the man or woman who is duped or dazzled by the glitter of Satan’s glory. Woe to the sad soul who borrows power from this generator of evil forces.

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First he empowers then he devours.

Even the Twelve argued among themselves over who was the greatest. *“But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest”* (Mk. 9:34). On one occasion he pointed to a child. On another to a servant. *“But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”* (Mk. 10: 43-44).

The child and the servant were the two most powerless specimens of humanity in the World of Jesus. They had no power. They were powerless. Jesus pointed to these powerless people to illustrate to whom God gives his power. God gives grace to the humble.

While the world struggles for its share of the spoils of the earth (like the soldiers vying for the temporal estate of a dying Christ) Jesus has with both life and lesson demonstrated how to inherit that which is eternal. True riches and power are only Christ’s to give. And God in Christ shows us how to live. When God came down, *he “took upon him the form of a servant.”* Phil. 2:7.

Every Christian must understand that Lordship is not optional nor is true Christianity a convenience. What we do not give to God becomes a beachhead upon which Satan can come ashore. Once ashore he will use these places we would not surrender to God as strongholds in his war against Christ’s Lordship which is the next best thing in his continued attempts to discredit God’s Word.

The Spirit filled life is the God led life. The other side of Leadership is fellowship. Before there can be fellowship there must be followship. Servantship appreciates God’s wisdom and right to put us in our place. Worship finds God in his rightful place, followship (or leadership) puts us where we belong. *“He ordained twelve.”*

Every servant has his duty. *“he sent them forth to preach”* Mk. 3:14. Life is a stewardship. We are all sent on a holy errand. Every soul must find God’s will and do it. To do less is to “miss the boat” so to speak. When God’s opportunities set sail we must already be on board. Should one ignore the last captain’s bell let him not fail to think that providence will replace one sailor with another.

The Christian life is also a partnership. Mark says *“and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils”* Mk. 3:15. It is sad to see the church argue over what this power is

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when it is obvious that those given to bickering are the most likely to have none.

When God is done with us it will not so much be what we have done, but rather what he has done with us. Both the church and the true child of God are something he has done, not what we have done. We are his workmanship.

Although the ship that carried him was caught in the most awful storm, the Apostle Paul knew he would make it to Rome. *“And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar...”* Servantship is a condition, a state, or sacred skill. He who sets sail to serve the Lord of Glory will safely make that final port of call. He who walks upon the deck of such a ship may be assured that the Captain of our Salvation knows well the way, and that no rock or reef shall wreck the faith of those who serve the Living God.