

## Voluntary Servitude

### Psalm 123

When most of us think about what it means to be a Christian, and more importantly what it means to be growing as Christians, you can't overlook the important skill or attribute of service.

Service. It is perhaps one of-- if not the most difficult part of one's Christianity. Service is without question core to relating with God. Yet, service is one of those subjects... one of those realities that bears repeating often.

**Karl Barth (a highly influential theologian in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century)** said that service is not about bringing glory to one's self, but is about bringing glory to the one being served. In his words-- "it is *ministerium Verbi divini* "a servant's attendance on the divine Word." He goes on to say that the "N.T. concept of *Diakonos* originally meant "a waiter."

Psalm 123 is a song about service. And in this case, psalm 123 is not an instructive piece of literature--as in telling us what we should do. Psalms are not like this. Psalms are not lectures or a collection of rules. Psalms are songs that show us what has been done. Psalms give us the opportunity to observe the evidence of what happens when a believer of God acts on his/her belief, love and desire to follow God. And this Psalm gives us a bird's eye view of what it looks like for a follower to put their life in the position of service.

The Psalmist says- "**I lift up my eyes to You, to You whose throne is in heaven.**" This idea of looking up is what it looks like to trust in God and to look to God for help in time of need. Three weeks ago we looked at Psalm 120 and noticed that a Christian life is one that trusts in the Lord (entitled- "In God We Trust"). Two weeks ago we looked at Psalm 121 and noticed, "Our help comes from the Lord."

Service to God begins with a posture that puts God in the proper place. Service to God begins with us looking up to the Lord. Service does not begin with looking at God or looking down on him. Service begins by acknowledging that God is over and above us.

It's sort of looks like what Nicole Nordeman says in her song

### **Tremble Lyrics**

Have I come too casually?

Because it seems to me

There's something I've neglected

How does one approach a Deity

with informality

And still protect the Sacred?

'Cause you came and chose to wear the skin of all of us

And it's easy to forget You left a throne

And the line gets blurry all the time

Between daily and Divine

And it's hard to know the difference

Oh, let me not forget to tremble

Oh, let me not forget to tremble

Face down on the ground do I dare  
To take the liberty to stare at you  
Oh, let me not,  
Oh, let me not forget to tremble

The follower of God... the servant always assumes a certain posture before God. To fail to see and assume this position will make it rather difficult for us to hear and respond to God.

Here's the problem for some. When a person becomes a Christian there's this new spirit (that's not the problem!)... This new drive (that's not the problem!)... This new confidence and assurance (this might be a problem)... We hear words like Matthew 7:7-12- Ask... Seek... Knock...

I mean God is coming to us showing us in the incarnated Christ that He is a servant. **Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...**"

With this reality about Jesus being a servant, it's easy to begin ordering God around. After all I'm quoting book, chapter and verse here! But God is not the kind of servant we call on when we're too tired to do something important for our lives. God is not the kind of servant who is this specialist when we realize that we don't have the skill to accomplish something in our lives. **Eugene Peterson** quotes **Paul Scherer** in his scathing remarks about people who go around lobbying in the courts of the "Almighty for special favors, plucking at his sleeves, pestering him with requests."

What I'm trying to say is that God is not a buddy we every now and then ask to join us in something we want at our convenience. When God says that he is a servant, he's not a servant that we get to order around. When God says that he's a servant it's about his invitation for us to join him in the plan he has to redeem us--and the world.

Many times this thinking that God is our servant is really about religion gone bad. It's about a belief that defaults into coming to God for assistance. We can put our order in to God so that he can get us what we want. After we put the order in, we go home and wait for God to respond to our order. This is bad religion. It simply doesn't work this way!

And if we give it some thought, we really wouldn't want it to work this way. Here's why:

- If God is God, he must know more about our needs than we do.
- If God is God; he must be far more in touch with our reality and our thoughts and our emotions and our fears than we'll ever be.
- If God is God; he must have a lot more knowledge of our relationships with others than we do.

The Bible is profoundly accurate about the relationship between God and his people-- people like you and me.

- It's a relationship that's between the Creator and the created.
- It gives us the knowledge of the God who loves us so that we can experience his love.
- It gives us the story of the God who leads his people through difficulties while allowing his people to experience being guided by him.

We do not have the Bible to convince us that God can help us out of jams (self-help book). Rather we've been given the Bible so that we can be presented with the God of the "Exodus, and the Easter

resurrection, and the God of Sinai, and the God of Calvary!"

All I can say is:

- "If you want to understand God, you must come to him on his terms and not your own."
- "If you want to see God as he really is, then you must look to the Scripture and you must look to Jesus the Christ."

Oh that's good news! We come to God and look up to him. We don't look at him or look down to him... No... we look up! **"I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven."**

Now there's another aspect of service to God that really has to do with our expectation. The question really is: what happens when we look up to God in faith? I ask this question because there's this mystery in God--we will never completely understand Him. **(For some people that's a pill way to hard to swallow)**

Think about it: We cannot define God, nor can we package God up like a complete set of China. There are many things about God that we'll never know, but we can know some things about God. It's not like we have to always be on the very edge wondering what will God do. It's not like we have to always live in this relationship with God wondering what to expect and what he might do. We know what God will do. We know what to expect from God. We expect God's mercy.

**Psa. 123 2b "so our eyes look to the LORD our God, till he shows us his mercy. 3 Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us"**

For the Christian, our conviction is that God is God and that God has good intentions for us and that God will get his way in us.

**You want some good news?**

- God does not treat us according to what we deserve! (This is really good news!!!)
- What God does is to treat us according to his plan.

The good news is that God is not like a State Trooper just waiting and watching the universe so that he can catch us. The Scripture tells us that God is the potter and we are the clay!

**Isaiah 64:8 Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.**

We know that God will work our lives; that he will form and shape us until finally we are formed into a vessel fit for the kingdom.

So we pray the prayer of the Psalmist- **Have mercy on us, O LORD, have mercy on us.** This prayer is not intended to teach us that this is what we do to get God to do what he is otherwise unwilling to do for us. This song... is intended to show us that we can reach out to what we know God does do.

So in obedience we pray "mercy" instead of "give us what we want."

- We pray "mercy" and not "reward us for the good things we do so that others around us will see how much better we are."
- We pray "mercy" and not "punish us so that we can feel better for the bad things we do."
- We pray "mercy" and not "provide us with good things in life so that we'll continue to serve you."
- We pray "mercy" and not "be nice to us because we have been nice to others."

The good news here is that we live under "mercy!" We look up to God in faith believing that he will

come down and enter into our lives.

The servant life is one that is dependant on God. The Psalmist sings that we have been beat up long enough. **Psalm 123:3b-4**

**MSG-** We've been kicked around long enough, Kicked in the teeth by complacent rich men, kicked when we're down by arrogant brutes.

This is a song that is recurrent throughout human history. And it's an experience that is never a happy one. The Psalmist lived in a culture where the slave and the servant were essentially institutionalized... as world history has shown us again and again. History has really shown us that this has not really worked very well. Power breeds oppression. History has shown us that masters tend to get lazy and abusive with those under them. **"We've been kicked around long enough, Kicked in the teeth by complacent rich men, kicked when we're down by arrogant brutes."**

This is a song that longs for deliverance from oppression. And the truth be known, we also live in similar slavery. Freedom is on everyone's lips. Freedom is lauded and celebrated by many. But not many feel free or act free in our world.

Look: We live in a nation of complainers.

- I can't spend my money the way I want to.   •I can't really be myself
- I can't spend my time the way I want to.   •It seems like I'm always under the control of others

We live in a nation of addicts (drug, sex, food, work, materialism... you name it we got it!)

**When we trade masters, we stay enslaved.**

But not the Christian! The Christian has come to better understand that it's not the pursuit of freedom that creates the problem for us, but it's in learning service to a better master while living in the world.

**Here's what the Christian person realizes:**

- That every relationship that excludes God becomes oppressive. **(Barth- if you get God wrong you get everything else wrong.)**
- That they desperately desire to live under the mastery of God.

So Christian servitude is not about standing around waiting to be ordered to do something. Christian servitude is more about desiring; pursuing God and, saying like Eli told Samuel, **'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening. (1 Samuel 3:9b)**

The Apostle Paul gave us a verse that hits the nail on the head in regards to Christian servitude. Romans 12:1 says- **Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (NASB) (CEV) Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God.**

What I see here is that the service we offer to God (in worship) is extended in acts of service to others. What I see here is that you take your every day, ordinary life--your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around kinda life-- and lay it before God as your service... as a part of your worship as an offering. In other words--the service we offer God (worship) is extended into specific acts of service to others. **It ends up looking more like this:** We learn a relationship and an attitude toward

life and a posture of servitude before God, and then--we become available to be of use to others in acts of service.

I said at the start of this lesson that Psalm 123 is a song about service. It's not instructive. Rather this Psalm gives us the opportunity to observe the evidence of what happens when a believer of God acts on his/her belief, love and desire to follow God. Psalm 123 illustrates what it looks like for a follower to put their lives in the position of service.

This Psalm has nothing in it about serving others. Its primary focus is on serving God. But it goes without saying that if the attitude of servant-hood is learned by seeing God as the LORD--then serving others will be more natural in our daily lives.

When God is LORD his commands will be heard. Commands to be hospitable (involve people in your life)--to be compassionate--to visit the sick--to help and heal those in need.

As we live out the life of servitude look at our encourager Jesus, who said: **(John 13:12-17)**

When we put God in the proper place in our lives (putting ourselves under the lordship of a merciful God), the consequences of our lives will be positive. To this day I have not heard a Christian servant ever complain about the oppressiveness of his/her servitude. I'm convinced that a servant Christian is the freest person on earth!

May you leave this place looking up to God and may you be his servant at home, at work, in the market--wherever you may go this week.

**Scot Poirier**

Minister

Chelmsford Church of Christ

205 North St.

Chelmsford Ma.

978-256-8901