

Wired to Serve

July 2nd, 2017

I was reading a **Psychology Today** article a few days ago about a very successful & wealthy businessman.

- This guy, was filled with ambition and was at the top of his game. It was in his blood.
- As young man, he was always reading profiles of all the heroes of Wall Street...
- Stories of successful entrepreneurs and CEO's **who were higher up** on the corporate ladder than he was.

Of course, he loved reading these stories because they fueled his own drive to the top.

- Now, initially, the **ages of everyone he was reading about** were older than he was, which worked out great...
- Because, he always had it as his goal that **when he got to their age**, he would at least be where they were.

But, one day, the incredibly successful entrepreneur **he was reading about...**

- Who had **climbed far higher than he had** on the corporate ladder... turned out to be younger than he was.
- And when he saw that, he felt a pain inside his gut.

You see, as long as the stories were about people who were older, he could **tell himself that he would one day out-climb** him or her.

- But now there was someone on a faster track than he was.
- And, as the years went by, there were **more and more stories about men & women** who were younger... and more successful... who had climbed higher than he had.

And each time he'd read about one of them, he'd get a little more depressed... till one day, he had a near breakdown.

- With all he had, he just wasn't fulfilled. In fact, he was totally on empty.
- He realized that the burst of gratification that came with **each new deal** and with **each promotion** never lasted very long.

And, as he looked at his life, he realized, almost for the first time, that **His marriage was on life support**;

- That he had been **an absentee dad to his kids**, all of whom were struggling.

- Even at church... as he looked around the room at all the familiar faces, he realized that **he didn't really know anyone.**

If what you believe is demonstrated by what you do rather than what you say,

- Then **his relentless pursuit of more and more success** had become the most important things in the world to him.
- And yet, he convinced himself that contentment was just a few more rungs up the ladder...
- That, **if he just climbed a little further up the ladder**, he'd finally be able to **make time for his family & church.**

So, he kept climbing... losing his family and spiritual life in the process.

- It's why Stephen Covey, author of "7 Habits of Highly Successful People," **encouraged people to "be sure that, as you scramble up the ladder of success, it is leaning against the right building."**

You see, a whole lot of people really do devote much of their lives to this... to climbing ladders.

- Not just corporate ladders... but ladders of recognition, status, healthy and beauty, perfect children, and so on.
- And it's all built around the promise that **if you could just make it** to the top...
- *Then* you'll really enjoy the good life... the life you were meant to have.

But, to all those whose lives are fixed around **Status-Building & Ladder-Climbing**, the Apostle Paul writes these challenging words in **Philippians 2:5**:

- He says that, **"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus..."**
- Now, let me pause to say that most New Testament scholars think that,
- **because of its rhythm and poetry**, the rest of this passage is actually an ancient hymn.
- Seriously... these words are likely one of the earliest worship songs in the church:

*"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, **who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to cling to**; Rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant when He was born as a human being. (Philippians 2:5-7)"*

Think about those words... Jesus, ***“being in very nature God, became a servant.”***

- *The NLT reads like this... that Jesus, “though He was God, became a servant.”*
- Now, the way most Bibles basically translate that reflects the idea that *“Jesus, in spite of the fact that He was God, became nothing.”*
- that, ***in spite of the fact that He was God... Jesus became a servant.***

And, from a human standpoint, **translating it like that makes sense.** I mean, “If I’m God, I obviously don’t have to give up my divine privileges.”

- ***“I don’t have to become a servant... especially not to those I created!”***
- ***I mean, that’s the good thing about being God, right?!”***
- And yet, in spite of the fact that He was God, Jesus became a servant.

And yet, I think Paul’s actually saying just the opposite. In other words, this passage should be translated to say that *“Your attitude should be the same as Christ Jesus who...*

- o ***precisely because He was in very nature God...***
- o ***precisely because He did not consider equality with God as something to cling to...***
- o That it’s ***precisely because He was God that Jesus became a servant.***
- In other words, **Jesus came as a servant, not in spite** of the fact that He was God, **but because** He was God!

You see, it is the nature of God to serve. We serve a God whose very nature is to serve and to sacrifice.

- When God came to earth, He came as the most humble person who had ever lived...
- Not to make a point... but because that’s who He is.
- Giving up, the coronations of heaven for the **condemnations** of earth; the majesties of heaven for the miseries of earth
 - o the songs of heaven for the sneers of earth
 - o the throne of heaven for the tree of Calvary
- We’re told in **verse 7** that ***“He gave up His divine privileges and took the humble position of a servant.”***

- And when He appeared as a human being, **verse 8** tells us that ***“He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.”***

In all of this, what we see is that when Jesus came to this earth as a servant, **He was not disguising** Who God is; or, **living in contrast to who God is.**

- Instead, **He was revealing** Who God is.
- This clearly isn’t a story of someone who is climbing up some corporate Ladder.
- But rather, it’s the story of Someone who’s **come down** from the top of that ladder to serve and to sacrifice.

Now, when you think about that corporate ladder, **where would you rank that job title—God?** It would be pretty high up on the chart!

- And yet, Jesus gives it up.
- **He doesn’t**, as Paul says here, **consider His position** as something to be clinged to.
- He doesn’t consider His position as a ***rationale against serving*** those who should be serving Him.
- Instead, He steps off His throne in heaven and **becomes a servant.**

But **even the angels in Heaven are servants**, so He goes lower still. He **becomes a human being.**

- He comes down the Ladder a little more... and takes on flesh and blood—He take on **our means, our limitations..**
- And yet, because there are some people who **live as kings** or celebrities, He **takes another demotion.**
- He humbles Himself even more. He’s **born in a stable**... to a penniless mother and father—a peasant kid.

But even that is not low enough. There are lots of impoverished people in our world. And so, **He keeps going down.**

- We’re told that He becomes ***“obedient even to death.”***
- In other words, His **ultimate task was not some glorious achievement**; nothing a Ladder-Climber would ever dream of.
- Instead, ***“He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross”*** (Philippians 2:8).

In **Galatians 3:13**, Paul quotes Moses’ words from Deuteronomy 21:23 saying, ***“Anyone who is hanged on a tree is a curse of God.”***

- So, understand that in the culture of Jesus's day, anyone who has been "obedient to death on a cross," is clearly someone who has hit the lowest rung of life's ladder.
- It was **a fate was abhorred** above all others.

So, how can it be that Jesus, who was in very nature God, would then humble Himself and die on a cross?

- Well, that's the Good News! You see, this is about One who went down the Ladder as far as He could go...
- **not in spite of** the fact that He was God, but **precisely because** He was God.

You know... just as the Priests were praying in the Temple for the Messiah to come...

- Jesus was passing right by them riding on the back of a colt into Jerusalem on His way to Calvary.
- The problem with spending our lives **always working our way to the next rung** of the Ladder is...
- that **while you're giving your life to going up**, you might unknowingly pass right by our Messiah, who's **always coming down to us**.

And, after He came down, **Jesus gathers** this little community and **He teaches & models for them** what life in the Kingdom is like...

- But, teaching this group of people wasn't always easy... because, in their own way, **they all had a tendency toward Resume-building & Ladder-Climbing**.
- In fact, several in Jesus' community actually had an argument where they debated over **who was the #1 disciple**.

In **Luke 9:46**, we're told that *"An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest."*

- In **Matthew 20**, the mother of James & John comes up to Jesus and asks Him if her two sons could sit on either side of Him when they all get up to heaven.
- Of course, that got the other disciples upset.

So, Jesus says, **"You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different."**

- In other words... "You know how the leaders around you live for power and success. But that's not what our community is going to look like."

- ***“Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”***

Harold Kushner once wrote about a very bright, **very driven pre-med student** at Stanford University...

- who **dreamed of passing all his fellow-students** on the way to the top of the ladder.
- While traveling in the East the summer before his junior year, **he met a guru who challenged him:**
- “Don’t you see you’re poisoning your soul with this success-oriented way of life?”

Your **idea of happiness** is to stay up all night studying for an exam so you can get a better grade than your best friend. That’s your idea of happiness?!

- Your **idea of a good marriage** is not to find a woman who’ll be your soul mate, but to win the girl everybody else wants?!
- That’s not how people are supposed to live! Come and join me and my disciples in an atmosphere where we all share and love one another.”

Well, turns out, this kid was ripe for this religious leader’s message, so he called his parents and told them he was dropping out of school to live in a commune.

- Six months later, his parents got a letter from him: *“Dear Mom and Dad, I know you weren’t happy about my decision to drop out of school, but I want to tell you how it’s changed me...”*
- For the first time in my life, I’m at peace. There is **no competing** here; There’s **no trying to get ahead** of anyone.
- This way of life is **so in harmony with my inner soul** that in only six months I’ve become the #2 Disciple in the entire community, and I think I can be **Number One** by June!
- It can be hard getting off the ladder of success once you get on.

Does anybody remember a 20th Century athlete whose tag line was, ***“I am the greatest?”*** Yes... Mohammed Ali!

- He tells this story about himself. One time, he was on a plane, and everybody was supposed to buckle up their seatbelts, but he didn’t want to do it.
- The Flight Attendant said, “You have to put on your seatbelt.”

- He answered, *“I’m not going to put a seatbelt on, because I’m Superman.”*

He went on about how he didn’t have to do this, and she kept telling him that he had to do it, explaining to him that it was like a safety law.

- They couldn’t take off until he put it on. And he finally said, *“I’m not going to do it, because I’m Superman, and **Superman don’t need no seatbelt!**”*
- So, the stewardess got a little sassy with him and said, *“**Well... if you’re Superman then why don’t you fly yourself to where you’re going?!**”*

You see, the disciples, **they thought they understood how the world worked**. And yet, undeterred, Jesus would try to shift their mindsets.

- But when it came to climbing ladders and being a servant, **the lecture method** was not getting Him anywhere.
- So Jesus decided to create a visual for them... to **model something** they’d remember.

On the night before Jesus was betrayed, He and His disciples were gathering together, about to have dinner.

- But apparently, they started **arguing over whose job was** it to hire a servant **to wash their feet** once they arrived.
- This was important, because, as you can imagine, in those days, people went around mostly in sandals or barefoot.
- Roads were dusty and when it rained, they were muddy.

There were animals on them all the time— and nobody cleaned up after them. Feet were not hygienic.

- But, as you can imagine, that job of foot-washer was one of the most menial job that you could have in those days.
- I mean, this was clearly “Bottom of the Ladder” work!

But while the disciples were arguing among themselves **who was supposed to hire** the foot washer,

- Jesus... **being in very nature God**, grabs a basin of water and takes a towel...
- Not in spite of His being God... but precisely because He was God...
- the Sovereign, Creator King of the Universe **bent down and washed the dirty feet of His disciples**.
- Honestly... they had not seen anything like this in their lives.

I had two experiences with foot-washing two years ago... experienced that I'll never forget.

- The first was in Istanbul, Turkey. I was with a group of Turkish men and I shared a little about my family history...
- How, my mother's grandparents were killed in their village in Southeastern Turkey during the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Well, one of the Turkish men was from that same village... and he knew that his ancestors were involved in this horrific crime.

- So, he sat me down and began taking off my shoes and socks... and started washing my feet while weeping.
- Between his painful cries, were words I couldn't understand... words that were translated for me into English.

- **He was begging my forgiveness. [show pic]**

A week after that, I traveled to that village in Southeastern Turkey. With all the Armenians gone, the city was now filled with Kurds.

- And, while there, I spoke at the only Kurdish church in the area.
- And, after I spoke, a Kurdish believer put a chair in front of the pulpit... and asked for water and a towel as he took off my shoes and socks.

There, on his knees in front of me, he started crying out, **asking for my forgiveness, which I offered him. [show pic]**

- Though, I didn't offer it to him lightly. If it weren't for Jesus Christ and the model He is in my life, I could never have offered him my forgiveness.
- The Turks and Kurds decimated most of my great-grandparents. All of my grandparents suffered horribly.
- Truth is, it was Christ who allowed me to truly forgive these men... and it was Christ who led those Turkish and Kurdish men to their knees

Let me ask you... how many of you had ever seen the TV show called The Apprentice **made famous by our now President?**

- It's about a group of people who compete for the privilege of hanging out with and working Donald Trump.
- Well, if you're familiar with the show, what do you think the odds would have been...
- to see Donald Trump get down on his knees and **polish the shoes of all the people trying out** to be his apprentice?
- It would never have happened.

But Jesus gets down on His knees— and, ***being in very nature God***—He takes a basin of water and a towel, and goes up to Peter to wash his feet.

- But, in **John 13:8**, Peter says, “No way. You’re not going to do this!” **Jesus says**, “Yes. This is necessary.”
- And so, ***precisely because He is God***, Jesus takes those dirty, unclean feet with His hands and washes them and dries them off.

He does this... one disciple after another. And **when He’s done**, this is what He says to them in **John 13:12-17**...

- “Do you understand what I have done? 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 given you an example to follow... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

And with this, Jesus had started an alternative community in a world of Ladder Climbers where...

- Instead of stepping on others on the way to the top, **people would put a towel over an arm** and ask, “**How can I serve you?**”
- And in this community, there was to be **no climbing over one another, no comparing, no unhealthy competition** at one another’s expense—just a **bunch of courageous Foot Washers**.

Truth is, turning Ladder Climbers into Towel Bearers may just be one of the hardest things to do.

- And yet, Jesus reminds us in **verse 16** that, because we’re not above our master, we’re meant to **exchange our ladders for towels & basins...** to serve one another in love.
- In other words, if we ever begin entertaining the thought that we’re somehow too **sophisticated** or too **important** or even **too busy**... to pick up a towel...
- Than **we’re making ourselves greater than our Master**. That’s what Jesus was saying.

Truth is, we’re going to have to ask God for a lot of help with this, because we’re all living here in “Ladderville.”

- And yet... once you embrace the invitation of the Master...
- Once you **not only pick up** that towel... **but** begin using it, you’ll begin to discover a strange thing...
- That **Towel Bearing** ends up bringing a whole lot more joy to your life than **Ladder-Climbing & Success-Building**.

Jesus who **climbed down the Ladder to its lowest rung**... was lifted up... and was exalted by God **to the highest place**.

- And the day is coming, Paul says, when everybody will find themselves off of the Ladder...
- A day when **every knee** will **touch the ground**, and **every tongue confessing that Our Servant King is God!**

Every knee will bow, and every tongue's going to confess, that the One Who humbled Himself to the lowest place... has **now been exalted** and given the highest name.

Can you imagine what that will be like? **Donald Trump's** knees are going to touch the ground.

- **Barak Obama** and **Hillary Clinton's** knees will touch the ground.
- Imagine a **joint session of Congress**... with every Democrat and Republican congressman on their knees before Jesus.

Hassan Rouhani of Iran, **Kim Jong-un** of North Korea, **Xi Jinping** of China,

- **Bashar al-Assad** of Syria, **Vladimir Putin**; **One day they'll all be on their knees**.
- Imagine all those leading ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hamas... one day on their knees.

They may not be there willingly... **they may have lived lives** that chose eternal separation from Jesus.

- But, there will nonetheless be a moment when everyone will fall on their knees with **either dread fear or perfect joy**...
- Acknowledging that Jesus Christ, the Servant King, was in fact, God Almighty.

You see, one day, every knee will bow, and every tongue's going to confess,

- that the One Who humbled Himself to the lowest place... has **now been exalted** and given the highest name.
- And it's this **exalted Servant** who says in **verse 17**...
- **"Now that you know these things..."** *Now that you've heard it and now that you've seen it, "you'll experience My blessing if you do the same thing."*

So, what about us? Well, **in a culture that defines "blessing" as what's at the top of the ladder**...

- Even in the Christian culture around us that defines blessing as being safe & secure... as being well-entertained and self-fulfilled.
- Where “blessing” is a life of God serving our interests rather than our serving Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, & strength...

I think we’re being called to walk ***not in the world’s shoes***, but Jesus’... who, ***though He was God***, became a servant.

- I think we’re being called to be a community not of Ladder-Climbers...
- But a community of foot-washers and Towel-Bearers. Because that’s where God-sized blessing comes from.

Jesus told His disciples after He washed their feet... that, in doing that, He was modeling something to them that would lead to a life of meaning and significance and joy.

- That’s why Paul, one of the most **brilliant & influential people** in all of history wrote, in 2 Corinthians 4:5,
- That **“We don’t go around preaching ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord and that we are your servants for Jesus’ sake.”**

Here, this profound figure of history **reminds us that a true leader is a true servant...**

- Echoing Jesus’ words in **Matthew 20:26**, that *“those who desire to be great in God’s Kingdom must be the servant of all.”*
- Think about what Jesus is saying here... that ***“the Son of God did not come to be served but to serve.”***
- Could we possibly live any other life?

One of the recurring conversations I used to have with my girls centered *not so much* around what they want to be when they got older...

- But “who” they want to be when they get older. I’d ask them, what kind of person do you want to be?
- What kind of person do I want to be here within our own **church community** here?
- Am I looking to be **served... or to serve**? Am I motivated by the **ladder or the towel**? Am I reflecting Jesus’ heart to serve?

Just take an honest assessment of your life. Clearly you can’t meet every need around you...

- But are you serving? Beyond what impacts and benefits your own life, are you serving?

- If Jesus were here, would He not serve? Would He not walk into those Sunday School classes and teach?

Would He not offer you a cup of coffee? Would He not serve on the ministry team?

- Would He not serve the single moms in our area living at or below the poverty line through what we're doing with AAMC?
- Where is there a need? Perhaps you have one hour a week to serve. Well... are you serving?
- Are you serving here or another context?

If so... then He says that He's going to bless you with a life of meaning & significance... a life reflecting the Master Servant's life.

- Those aren't my words... they're His.
- And *if* He should find me living out a servant's life... the life of a towel-bearer instead of a ladder-climber...
- Then the **only blessing** I want from Him is... more of Him.

"In your relationships with one another, Paul says, "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to cling to; Rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant when He was born as a human being. (Philippians 2:5-7)"

If your mindset isn't aligned to His... would you choose today to walk in His footsteps...

- to **climb down from the ladder** to live in His presence as a towel bearer and servant there at the lowest rung of the ladder?