

**“Becoming Like Jesus the Servant, Together” | Mark 10:35-45
(Becoming Like the Real Jesus, Together)**

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(Discussion questions on page 9)

Last year I saw a commercial for the online therapy service “Better Help” that was powerful and clever.

A twenty-something male is seated on a couch when a friend asks him, “What do you want?” As the camera zooms in on his face, the melancholy-looking man answers:

Well, I want a job I can be proud of.... sometimes I feel like I just want someone to tell me exactly what to do. I want to be more confident and less scared. Sometimes I feel like I’m on an island and everyone else is in these rowboats with their full lives rowing somewhere and I don’t have a boat, I’m just stuck, forgotten.

The camera then pans to his friend, who, with his phone held in hand, is looking a little confused and responds:

I mean, What do you want to eat? Oh, Just the Pad Thai, says the man on the couch, a little embarrassed.¹

The ad’s message: beneath the surface a lot of people are not doing so well. They want more out of life than a meal—they are hungry for meaning and purpose, but don’t know how to find it.

Today we move to part two of our sermon series, *Becoming Like the Real Jesus, Together*. Jesus is the perfect image of God, and in His humanity presents to us what true, authentic humanness looks like. Last week we looked at *Jesus the Son*, noting that to be human is to know you *come from God*, that your identity (the question, *Who am I?*) is grounded in belonging to God as His son or daughter.

This week we add to the question *Who am I*, the question, *What am I for or, what is my purpose in life?* For humans, questions of identity are bound up with questions of vocation and purpose. We want more than mere existence; we want to know our lives count, that in what we do with them there is meaning and purpose.

Last year Harvard Graduate School of Education published a report on mental health challenges of young adults among Generation Z (Gen Z are people between the ages 12-27; young adults in this demographic are 18- to 27-year-olds).²

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrNFbKxmT2s&t=50s>

² See “On Edge: Understanding and Preventing Young Adults’ Mental Health Challenges.”

The surprising finding was that as Gen Z moves out of their teens into their twenties, rates of anxiety don't go down; they double. One of the factors, the study found, was that as these young men and women move out into the world and try to find their way, they feel lost and directionless. The study found that nearly 60% of Gen Z young adults reported that they lack "meaning or purpose" in their lives.

Why is our culture not setting young people up better for finding meaning and purpose in life?

I want to suggest today, as we take our second look at Jesus' revelation of humanness, that it may lie in a fundamental misunderstanding of our posture in the world.

We seem to be teaching young people that meaning comes ultimately from what we do—and how this *doing* expresses our true self and fulfills our self's desires.

But when we look to Jesus, we see that true meaning comes not first from what we do, but from who we serve—and that through this *serving*, we find pleasure and fulfillment in honoring our Master, and His plans and wishes for those around us.

As we take our second look at Jesus the True Human, we see he is not only a Son, but a Servant. And in everything he does, meaning and purpose come from knowing he is obeying His Father, serving Him and His purposes in the world. Jesus models a shift from *selfhood* to *servanthood*, and by doing so invites us to connect our actions in this world—anything from running a company to tipping a waiter—to offering obedient service to God. He turns even the most mundane tasks into a theater for honoring our Lord.

To be human, Jesus reveals, is to find meaning and purpose in servanthood. We will consider this theme in two ways: **(1) First, noting the theme in Jesus' life and across Scripture**—seeing how extensive it is. **(2) And second, by carefully looking at how Jesus' models servanthood, asking how this lifestyle may impact our own.**

I. Servant-Theme in Scripture

Jesus as Servant

Jesus describes his vocation—his purpose and work in the world—as servanthood in Mark 10, and after his disciples James and John ask him an embarrassing question:

Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory (10:37).

They want positions of power in the coming kingdom. But Jesus turns their view of leadership on its head:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ But it shall not be so among you. But whoever

would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

This statement shocks and prepares the way for Jesus' later actions of washing his disciples' feet and laying down his life for sinners on the Cross.

Servanthood, for Jesus, is not something he does a few times. It's the essence of his vocation and calling—and has prophetic roots:

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah of a coming figure who would come to be known as the "Servant of the Lord" or "Suffering Servant."³ The Lord announces in Isaiah 42:

Behold, my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations (Isa 42:1).

The Servant will be called by God:

The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name. (Isa 49:1-2).

The Servant will instruct people and lift up the weary:

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. (Isa 50:4).

The Servant is totally committed to God's will, no matter the cost:

The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. (Isa 50:5-6).

And the Servant does all this, for God's honor and our salvation:

he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:4).

³ The so-called "Servant Songs" are four songs in the Book of Isaiah, which include Isaiah 42:1–4; Isaiah 49:1–6; Isaiah 50:4–11; and Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

This great prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus, and this is what Jesus means when he says to his disciples in Mark 10: The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

As the Son of God, Jesus set aside his glory and came into the World to serve the will of the Father, which is how Paul explains the movement of his life:

though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men
(Phil 2:6-7).

Humans as Servants

And Jesus calls his followers to imitate Him: whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. (Mark 10:43-44).

When we take in the vista of Scripture, we realize that so many of the leaders in the Bible understood themselves not first as prophets, or kings, but as the servant of the Lord: Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Nehemiah, all understand themselves as “the servant of the Lord.”⁴ As do Paul, James, Peter.

Paul, a servant of God... (Titus 1:1); James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1).

Perhaps more enlightening is that the Bible reveals that all human being are servants: we either serve the true God, or false gods.⁵ With even more intense language, we are slaves.

Jesus teaches that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34). Paul says humans are either “slaves to sin” or “slaves to righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18).

⁴ For example: **Joshua: Josh. 24:29** After these things Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being 110 years old. **Samuel: 1Sam. 3:9** Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place; **1Sam. 3:10** And the LORD came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.” **Saul: 1Sam. 14:41** Therefore Saul said, “O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? **David: 2Sam. 7:5** “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in?; **Psa. 19:11** Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. **13** Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! **Solomon: 1Kings 3:6** And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. **Nehemiah: Neh. 1:11** O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name.” **Moses: Mal. 4:4** “Remember the law of my servant Moses.”

⁵ Israel is not liberated from slavery in Egypt to choose whatever life they want—they are liberated to serve God: Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.”’ (Exod 8:1).

To be human, is to be serving something. The question is who or what has the greatest influence and sway over your life—because that is what you are serving.

Not only are we human dependent creatures—relying on things outside ourselves for survival, like food, water, air. We are subservient creatures—by nature inclined to *follow after, go after, be led by*, everything from our own strange desires to the voices and movements around us.

To be human, is to be a servant of someone, or something. What Jesus offers us, then, is the model of what True Servanthood looks like.

With the rest of our time, we will consider how Jesus models this, and how it may be imitated in our own lives.

II. How Jesus' Models Serving

We will briefly note three things: The Human practices servanthood by **(1) Surrender to God; (2) Serving the Person in Front of You; (3) and drawing joy and strength—not from success—but from the pleasure of God.**

(1) Surrender to God

God the Son does not first serve people. He first serves God the Father. Jesus does not obey humans, he obeys God. Before he says in Mark that he lays down his life as a ransom, he says that “the Son of Man *came*”—and that very “*came*” has a world to reveal to us about where servanthood beings. Jesus came—his incarnation—was an act of obedience to God the Father; serving God was his first priority:

I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. (Jn 5:30). In Gethsemane, “.... not as I will, but as you will” (Matt 26:39).

Jesus calls his followers to order their life of serving the same: Submission to God comes first:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. (Matt 7:21).

Servanthood begins when we acknowledge God not just as our Father, but as our Lord, Master, King. God is not something we add to our life, like an exercise routine or a pet. God is that Being to which we lay down our entire life—total surrender to His Will and His Way:

“Present your bodies,” say Paul, meaning entire lives, “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1).

Luther once spoke of getting lost under a single word when he set out to study the ten commandments: “I have many times essayed thoroughly to investigate the ten

commandments, but at the very outset, “I am the Lord thy God,” I stuck fast; that very one word, I, put me to the *non-plus* (=no more).⁶

God *Is*, and we are small planets orbiting Him. Surrender to him must reach down to our often-unspoken assumptions and dreams. James and John were serving God—so it seemed—but they were doing so to get prestigious futures in his kingdom. Jesus told them they had to lay that down, too: there is no prosperity Gospel in servanthood.

Putting God first is also key for properly serving others. If you begin with the felt needs of people, you may do them more harm than good. Jesus often has to deny people what they want, in order to do for them what they need: E.g., He denies Peter the right to protect him from arrest, because Jesus must provide for Peter forgiveness on the Cross. Our service to others must be motivated by, and informed by, our service to God.

And surprisingly, when we surrender totally to God, even if it doesn’t change our outer circumstances, it somehow makes them lighter. Rather than bearing the entire load of responsibility for those we serve (children, a spouse), we put that on God. We trust that he has us where he wants us, and for a reason. He’s calling the shots; He’s the boss; He’s okay answering for how things are unfolding—we can put all that weight on him, a relief.

(2) Serve the Person in Front of You

A second thing we learn when we look at Jesus the servant is that a servant serves *actual people*—which for us means the people in front of us.

The incarnation meant that Jesus would serve in a particular time and place. Of course, his death on the Cross has significance for people across time—but that significance is brought to people through us, as we share the Gospel in concrete times and spaces, with real people.

In a town like Washington, we can feel pressure to find heroic ways to serve—big causes or movements to give our energy to. But more often, God is calling you to serve the people right in front of you.

For parents, your call to serve centers around your children—those who God has placed in your home. They are there on purpose, and in sacrificially caring for them unto the honor of God, you are to feel much of your purpose.

Church family: God calls us into his body to serve each other. The people who make up Jesus’ new community, the church, are known by how they “love one another” (Jn 13:34-35). They are called to “welcome,” “bear with,” “encourage,” “care for” and “stir up” one another (Rom 12:5; Gal 5:13; Rom 15:7; Col 3:13; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Cor 12:25; Heb 10:24).

⁶ Martin Luther, “Of God’s Word” in *Table Talk*.

The earlier mentioned Harvard study noted a correlation between a loss of religious communities and a sense of meaning for people, noting:

while we are not arguing here for or against young people becoming more religious, there are important structures, traditions, and practices in many religious communities that create meaning and purpose, that enable young people to feel part of a larger human experience that transcends their achievements, and that mitigate loneliness.⁷

You may be asking questions about vocation currently—what career is right for you. This sermon is not the place to get into the specifics of your calling. It is instead, however, to show you the essence of your general calling as a servant of God and others, which informs everything else you do—whether as an engineer, firefighter, parent, pastor, writer or whatever, you are called to be a servant. Don't miss the call to serve the person right in front of you. You will be surprised to see how serving the person right in front of you opens conduit for meaning and purpose to flow into your life.

(3) The Suffering-Servants Survives by the Pleasures of God

Jesus' model of servanthood goes to the extreme of being crucified—with an array experiences of pain leading up to that. It is clear that in this fallen world, afflicted by evil and sin, serving God and others will entail suffering.

This doesn't mean we should expect only suffering, or must suffering inherently good. But it does mean that when we think about our callings and our vocations, we are careful not to impute too much of the modern idea of fulfillment and success into them. What pleases us most in our callings, is pleasing our Lord.

God may call you to serve him in parenthood. At times this may be incredibly fulfilling and look like success as children flourish. At others times, due to no fault of your own, this may look like the hardest trial of your life, as a child seems broken and lost.

God may call you to serve him in a specific vocation, and you see some success. But then things get hard. Perhaps you even taste failure.

At times like these, if we only draw pleasure from immediate outcomes and how they give us a sense of fulfillment, we will know only discouragement. But if we realize that in many ways outcomes are out of our hands, and instead find pleasure in faithfulness to God, we always have occasion to hear God's words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

At times like this, all a servant may have to stand on is the *bare Word of God*—in the chaos of circumstances, only the Word of God that He is for you, will never leave you, and works all things out for good for those who love him.

⁷ "On Edge: Understanding and Preventing Young Adults' Mental Health Challenges." Access online here: <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/on-edge>

Jesus could not base his pleasure in serving upon immediate results nor upon circumstances: his heart had to be fed by the pleasure of being faithful to His Father. And it was the Father's pleasure in His Son, that kept Jesus going in his incredibly sacrificial service.

And Jesus' resurrection, and God's promises, assure the suffering-servant that God will eventually lift up the humble and weary. The pattern of Jesus' life—"who took the form of a servant, became obedient to the point of death on a Cross, and therefore was exalted by God" (Phil 2:7-9), will be the pattern of ours:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7).

And the servant must remember, that his or her master, is also their Father: He is for you. He is with you in the life he has called you to, upholding and forming you.

Perhaps the next time someone ask you, "What do you want?," like that thoughtful ad from Better Help, you can say—I want to be a faithful servant to my Lord today, and do good by someone He may put in my path. This may seem like a small vision of life to some, but it turns the most mundane day into a theater for serving the Living God.

To be human like Jesus, is to be a Servant to God and others.

Small Group Questions

1. Jesus says He came to serve, and to lay his life down as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). Can you think of a few ways that Jesus has served you, and still serves you today?
2. How do you think serving his Father helped Jesus endure his ministry on earth, especially when that ministry was painful? How did serving the Father act as *motivation* in Jesus' heart.
3. Who are some people God has put in your everyday life that He may be calling you to serve? What are a few ways you currently do, or could, serve them? How might Philippians 2:5-11, where in his call to serve Jesus "emptied" and "humbled" himself, inform how you serve them?
4. What are a few ways you can serve the spiritual needs of friends in your church? What are a few ways you can serve the spiritual needs of friends outside the church?
5. How might understanding your purpose in life as servanthood impact how you answer the question, *What do you want?*