

West Side Fellowship

Works of Service – Blessings of service

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the whole body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4v11-13

Over the last few weeks we have looked at the various types of ministries listed above as well as ministries of helps and administration. In each case the ministry is always based on a servant's heart, a servant not of this world or even the church, but a servant of God. The one we serve is the one we take the time to listen to and is why it is so easy for the believer to finish up serving the world or even the church instead of serving the Father. For what the world wants and even what the church wants when it walks according to the intellect or flesh is rarely the same as what the Father wants. So no matter what ministry you are called to, it always starts with seeking the Lord and listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit. You can read all the books, know your Bible from cover to cover, yet if we are not willing to seek the Lord and listen, we have missed the very foundation of the servant heart. The heart that Jesus had and showed by his life as the way that we need to walk in. For if Jesus, the sinless Son of God needed to seek the Father, how much more do we need to seek him.

Let us be clear, if we do not want to seek the Father, no matter how our minds deceive us, the truth is that we do not have a heart after God! It doesn't matter how we try to dress things up or how spiritual or knowledgeable we think we are. If we are not willing to spend time seeking the Father, then we cannot claim that He is the desire of our heart, for we seek the things our hearts are set on. We can claim we are too busy, that there are other priorities that get in the way, yet when something is truly important, if our heart is set on it, we will make the time to fit it in.

A simple example is our eldest daughter Abi. Liz and I both lived very busy lives with no space to fit anything extra in, yet when she went into hospital, suddenly we found time to make the trip to Birmingham day after day, month after month. It just meant that things of lower importance had to be set aside. It's what we see in the life of Jesus; when he was very busy with constant interruptions, he would make the time to be alone with his Father by going out late in the evening or early in the morning to pray on the hills. He was willing to sacrifice his sleep, his bed, for the Father which is far more than many of us are willing to sacrifice.

Even as old age comes upon us, when our ability to minister physically starts to fade, we are still called to pray. It's interesting how one of the qualifications for a widow in **1 Timothy 5v5** is one who is seeking the Lord for themselves. That despite all the issues, including their health, their focus is still on seeking the Lord. Without seeking the Lord, the heart turns inwards and focuses on the issues of the flesh, the problems of this world become bigger than God and our desire becomes about meeting our physical needs. At that point Jesus is no longer Lord of our life, for the

driving force is not the Holy Spirit and the needs of the Kingdom of God, but rather the needs of our flesh.

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them. But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given you as well.
Matthew 6v31-33

This is why so many of us do not see the Lords provision in our lives in the way that we should; our focus is on self and what we are going through. As we look at Jesus we see that he did not look at himself with pity, even on the cross (**Hebrews 12v2**). Instead his joy was in serving the Father and meeting the needs of the Kingdom of God.

So often as believers we want all our problems solved before we are willing to serve. We get things back to front and then wonder why God is not blessing our rebellion. Let us understand that the Lord provides for the needs of His servants, we just need to make sure that we are doing what we are called to be doing and that starts with seeking the Lord with all our heart. **Luke 10v27** tells us that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God. That is far more than an emotional feeling. True love makes sacrifices, true love gives of itself for the one it loves. If we are not willing to make the sacrifice then our love has grown cold.

It is why we see in the parable of the sower (**Matthew 13v1-23**) that there are a series of heart conditions, the hard heart, the shallow heart, the worldly concerned heart and the receptive heart. Each of the conditions shows an attitude towards the Lord and shows us that only the good soil, the receptive soil is capable of receiving the word of God and allowing it to take root deep enough to cause growth that will bring blessing. Sadly this is the part that so many Christians do not understand; that there is true blessing in service! There will be struggles, trials, and by world standards even disasters, yet through them all we grow in our knowledge and understanding of Christ. Not a knowledge of God from a book, but a real knowing of God, an intimate loving relationship as Christ had with His Father. For if we are being transformed into the image of Christ (**2 Corinthians 3v18**), that transformation comes from spending time with the Father, seeking Him and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead, teach and transform the way we think and see the world and His kingdom (**Romans 12v2**). Only then do we truly start to experience the blessing of working alongside the Father and being partakers in His work. For we are told:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2v10

God has works of service for each one of us. Jobs waiting for us to do, and all we have to do is set our hearts on Him and seek Him for direction. We need to come to the Father as Jesus came to the Father, to become God dependant. If we don't set our hearts towards doing these works then we are telling the Father that we do not want to do what He wants us to do. It's the same rebellion we see in Adam in the garden, a rebellion that has it's root in Satan himself. For Satans rebellion was a refusal to serve God Almighty and instead put his own kingdom first.

Serving the Lord is a fundamental of the Christian walk and we need to understand that in service there is a route to spiritual growth and blessing that cannot be found in any other path. Jesus said his food was to do the will of the Father (**John 4v34**). While Paul said "He who doesn't work

doesn't eat" (**2 Thessalonians 3v10**). Quite literally, when we refuse to serve the Lord, when we refuse to work for Him we are literally starving ourselves of the provisions of God, we finish up having to eat the food of this world because our spiritual food is gone. It's nothing new, even the Israelites did the same with the Manna in **Exodus 16v20 & 27**. They ruined the Lord's provision on some days and missed out on other days because they refused to listen to the word of the Lord and went their own way instead. Refusing to follow in service led to a lack of food in their daily lives.

So let us think about the blessings of service.

The first blessing to think about is that as we serve, the flesh is put to death. As we walk according to the Lord we will grow spiritually as we feed on Him, yet in growing spiritually the flesh will die, for the flesh and the spirit want the opposite to each other. You may wonder why I have put this first; well if our goal is to walk according to the Spirit and grow up to be the true sons and daughters of God, then this obedience is a blessing as it produces in us the spiritual desires of our heart (**Romans 8v12-17**).

The next blessing that we find as we serve the Lord is that our faith grows. For God does not lead us in the paths of the possible, He leads us down the paths of the impossible, that we may see His power at work in our lives. Many Christians wonder why they do not see the signs and wonders of old. Well take a look at them and you will find that they occur when God's people are seeking after Him. As we look at the miracles of Jesus and the miracles that took place in the church, they occurred as people walked in obedience to the Lord and devoted themselves to His ways (**Acts 2v42-43**). The early church did not seek miracles, the Lord blessed them with miracles as they walked in obedience. Some of the miracles saw people getting healed, but notice, most of this did not occur in the church. Just as the disciples obeyed Jesus when He sent them out and experienced God's miracle working power, so we see the same in the early church in relation to their obedience "to go into all the world." If we want to see the Lord moving with power, we need to be walking in step with Him, following in the obedience that leads to service.

In my own life I have lost count of the ways the Lord has provided in impossible situations as we have stepped out to serve Him. It causes our faith to grow as we experience His provision in various formats and this provision does not just have an effect on my own faith, for the next blessing of service is the blessing to our friends, family and even the world around us. For as we walk in obedience and the Lord moves in power in our lives, our Christian walk takes on a new dimension, it becomes real and this reality overflows in our testimony to others. For when we talk about the Lord He is no longer remote, instead we are talking about how He interacts in our lives in a real way. This is especially important for our children, for as the Lord blesses us, our children experience this blessing first hand, not as a story they have been told, rather they get to see the reality of the Lord working in their lives. If we want the Lord to be real in the lives of our friends and family, then we need to let the blessings of our obedience overflow into their lives.

The next blessing of serving the Lord is the knowledge of knowing our part in the Kingdom of God. Knowing the roles that He has set aside for us that is perfect to fulfil His desires in our life. There is a peace and comfort in knowing our calling, for if we know we are in the right place we know that whatever struggles we face, the Lord is with us and will continue to lead and guide us. We start to understand the steps of faith that He asks us to take will each in turn bring us closer to Him. There is also the blessing of knowing that the Lord has entrusted a work to us. We are working alongside the Father for the furtherance of the kingdom. This leads to another blessing in that it keeps us

anchored, for many believers find themselves drifting from one place to another, one meeting or ministry to the next, because they do not know the calling on their lives. This also serves as a blessing for the 'over busy' as well, for when we know what the Lord has called us to do we know what is of Him and what is from the world. It stops us from getting bogged down in works that are just a distraction from our true calling and allows us to rest when we know that our work has been done.

A final blessing from serving the Lord is in the tough times. We all go through tough periods, times when there seems to be no way out and it's at this time also that the blessings and miracles that we have seen through service become a constant reminder of what the Lord can do. They help us to lift our eyes off the situation and once more fix them again on Jesus in even the most difficult of situations for we will have known his provision in the past, not as a theory but as a reality.

If Jesus could look on the cross with joy (**Hebrews 12v2**), then we in turn need to look at serving the Lord as a joy rather than as an unwilling burden that we have to carry. Service is an opportunity for us to grow in the Lord in the way that He desires. Jesus came as the servant king, let us in turn become imitators of Christ that we may bring glory to the Father.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord' did we not prophecy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers!'
Matthew 7v21-23

So let us all take the time to seek the Lord and find out His will for our lives for it would be a tragedy if the first time we truly heard the Lord was for Him to tell us He never knew us!