

Introduction

We've been studying the concept of the "servant leader". This was a thought that was totally foreign to the Jewish way of thinking. They simply couldn't accept the idea of leadership without the pomp and glory of supreme command. They wanted to rule the world and very arrogantly felt it to be their destiny. To them, the idea of a humble, suffering, servant Messiah such as described in Isaiah 53 was totally preposterous. Yet that is how God chose to save his people.

One man sacrificed for the world

In the most critical point in human history, a near total rejection of God was overwhelmed by the outpouring of God's unfailing love. The Son of God, Christ Jesus, was despised and rejected, and nailed to the cross. In the midst of his trial, one man gave some advice. In John 18:12-14 we read,

Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people.

Caiaphas knew that the Roman government would not tolerate riotous behavior on the part of any of its subject peoples. Caiaphas was not a servant leader; he was willing to sacrifice the one, Christ, because he didn't care (love) for him. He was one of those who believed in the supremacy of the Jewish race. He therefore decided that rather than risk the lives of people of his nation if things got out of his control he would sacrifice the one man Jesus Christ, no matter if he was innocent or not. As the recent song goes, "They crucify the innocent, and let the guilty go!"

Now this seems like a smart thing to do. But this doesn't mean that it is right to sacrifice one for the sake of the group. We might ask before we go much further if this idea really worked. If it doesn't work, then it doesn't matter how good it sounds it is not the best thing to do. In the case of the crucifixion, we know that Christ was not really the cause of the problem. The Jewish people themselves were like a powder keg that was ready to go off at any moment. Their pride in their own value kept them hostile to any form of servitude. So the death of Christ for the sake of the nation did not prevent it from dying by Roman hands in A.D. 70, when the Jews rebelled and Jerusalem was destroyed.

The servant leader will not sacrifice someone for the sake of a structure or organization. You might choose to save a group rather than an individual if you did not know the individual personally; but God knows each of us in a very personal way and will not sacrifice us like this. Christ went out and touched **individuals**. He spoke to the masses, too, but he was deeply concerned with the one-on-one interaction.

Man's rulers have usually assumed and demanded that their subjects be ready to die for them. The God of heaven reversed this order; he died for his subjects, though later he conquered death and rose from the grave. Christ is the ultimate servant leader, and He is our example to follow. I would just like to share a few ideas with you about what I think **one** characteristic of a servant leader is. Even though I will use the word "he" a servant leader can be male or female. The main idea that to me expresses this theme is that of the shepherd who cares for **every single sheep**.

The Model of the Shepherd

The image of a shepherd is that of a being filled with love for a helpless creature. David is always thought of as the model of the shepherd, for this was his duty as a young man, and he took it very seriously. We treasure his comparison to God's love for us in the 23rd Psalm, and in other Psalms. When David spoke to Saul about his faith in God, he gave examples of times when he had to fight very aggressively the lion and the bear to protect his sheep. But even when there were no enemies about, the job was still hard. Jacob describes it this way in Genesis 13:40:

This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes.

David had to suffer in the rain and the cold also. And the sheep could be so frustrating because they would just wander off, or they would run at the slightest provocation. But I have a picture in my mind of David searching for a lamb and bringing it back in on his shoulders. And he did not serve

them just for the wealth that they represented, but because he had a genuine love for each and every one of them. David put his life on the line for his sheep; later he also did it for his people.

Christ is the Ultimate Representation (Experience the Suffering)

The servant leader endures life with us; he has experienced our pain and so he understands us. I don't really think that anyone can really help if they haven't felt (experienced) the same thing that we do. Christ speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10; this was the image that he wanted to project. Consider again how Caiaphas sacrificed the one for the many in the story we read earlier. This is opposite to God's idea of servant leadership.

The Ninety and Nine

The principle of standing up for one rather than sacrificing them for the group was expressed by Jesus in one of his parables, found in Matthew 18:12ff. After talking about the purpose of Christ, to seek and save the lost, Jesus has this to say,

*"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, **he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.** In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.*

How powerful this love is that God has for us! How easy it is to argue that it is much better to let the single lost lamb go so that the shepherd could protect a larger number of sheep. Why run the risk of losing 99 when only one is lost? But God wants to show us the individual nature of his love, how it points to you and me as we seem to be covered up by a sea of humanity. He shows it as natural behavior **if we truly love the sheep.** Christ gave his life for each and every one of us, and he does not want a single soul to be lost. God calls every star by name, and he knows and loves each one of us as well. We must stress a ministry to individuals, where we are not worried about being important. **It is much better to have a quiet ministry which truly helps a small group of individuals than try to be the idol of all. Remember that the first shall be last and the last first (Matthew 19:30).** We should think more about what this means.

The Lost or Misplaced

Luke's account of this parable is the middle of a set of three (Luke 15:1-32) where we find great joy over recovering what was lost: the coin, the sheep, and the prodigal son. Nowadays when we think of the word "lost" in a religious sense, we usually think about those who have never heard of the gospel. We should certainly be concerned about these, but we lose sight of those closer at hand. Perhaps we should call them the "misplaced". These are lambs that have just drifted off and for whatever reason are not with the flock. It doesn't mean that they are no longer saved. But they are not communing with the congregation. And we are all diminished as a result.

We tend to focus on the strong. We prepare the table for the feast and "serve" only those who come. But Jesus made it very clear that he was out to gather in the weak. And the servant leader must serve the quiet sufferers as well as the squeaky wheels. In Mark 2:17 He said, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."** Christ didn't come just for the big groups of the strong who know or think they know how to take care of themselves. The sick ones were the ones in grave danger. This doesn't mean that those that have drifted away are to any degree greater sinners than the ones who stay. Truly good people are often misplaced. Jesus in the scripture above was not implying that any of us are truly righteous; only that some have drifted off from the mainstream.

Drifting Away

It is my experience is that those who drift away care very deeply about things. The symbolism of the iceberg may be appropriate. There is much more to people than what floats above the surface. People's feelings and problems can be very deep indeed. Many times those who drift away have been hurt, and are not bold enough to carry on in the church assembly (*among those by whom they have received their wounds*). We have to reach out and grab them back before they drift out of reach. The servant leader will cast out the line to bring them back.

The servant leader knows that the drifters can be gone for a long time without anyone noticing that they aren't around anymore. Have you ever left a child somewhere? Perhaps at a filling station when

you were on a vacation trip? Or have you ever been left behind by a group because you drifted off? Getting too far behind on a hike can get you lost. This is why it is essential that the church watches out for drifters. We must try to understand what the problems are that have produced the drift. We can't just shut our minds to it (be like those who might say, "I don't want to hear about it.") We can't be selective about who we want to help and keep.

Seeking the Lost

Christ is the kind of leader that will come back after you, and when he reaches you he will stand by you. If you remember Thomas and Peter, so bold in their outward conversation, both left Jesus when he was arrested. There was no one who stood by Jesus when he had to endure the trial; not a single voice in his favor is recorded. Only the crowd's shout "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" echoed in his ears. And He was taken to the cross where he offered himself to save us. But He felt the loneliness as He cried in Matthew 27:46, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Christ understands how forlorn that we can feel at times, even though God is always right there with us.

Christ knew that we needed him and he died knowing that it would save us. He loved us that much. We all need someone to stand by us, and Christ fills that place. But we must also stand by those who need us here on this earth, no matter who they are. There is something about this that is so beautiful to me, and I want to be that way, too. Max Lucado in his book A Gentle Thunder writes that there are "two gardens... In the first, Adam took a fall. In the second, Jesus took a stand." Indeed he has stood up for all of us and will stand in the presence of God to claim us as His own.

There is a native American saying that I am reminded of here. It goes something like this:

Love your friend and never desert him. If you see him surrounded by the enemy do not run away; go to him, and if you cannot save him, be killed together and let your bones lie side by side.

Jesus was accused of being a friend of tax collectors and sinners because he was not afraid to be with them. He went wherever they were. He eventually went to the grave and to the brink of hell to bring us out because he loved us so much.

The man born blind

One story about Christ that illustrates his concern for the individual is found in John 9. Jesus was walking along and saw a man blind from birth. To demonstrate the power of God, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. He then told him to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did this and went home able to see. When his acquaintances began to ask how this happened, he told them that the man they called Jesus had healed him. When the Pharisees heard of it they were upset because this deed was performed on the Sabbath. Moreover, they were afraid of their own loss of popularity. They argued with the healed man and even went to his parents to try to deny the healing power and truth of Christ. The Pharisees were so incensed at the consistent testimony of the man who was healed that they hurled insults at him and threw him out of the synagogue.

Now the interesting part is this. Jesus didn't care about the multitudes that he might have won by conforming to the ways of the Pharisees. Instead, when Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he sought him out; and when he had found him, he said (vss 35-38),

"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

"Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him."

Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."

Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him.

This was indeed what Christ was after; an individual interaction which led to true worship. The healed man worshipped Christ even though it meant the loss of fellowship with the community. Christ's ministry was to the weak who in their need responded to him with their whole heart! Large numbers were not his primary interest. Christ could have stayed in one place and had a huge, growing congregation! But he left the crowds to seek out the one that was "lost".

This was the first person (recorded) persecuted for worshipping and following Christ. You don't have to try very hard to feel the total abandonment that this man experienced. There he was, depressed at having lost it all so suddenly after he had found it all. Then he looks up and sees Christ coming to him alone, without the multitude. How could Christ have possibly lost the crowds, and why would he have done it just to talk individually with this man? There comes a time when a servant leader has to choose to go back. Jesus did for this man, and has that same kind of concern for all of

us. In a sense this is the whole story of Jesus. He is the soldier who comes at great risk after his wounded comrade like so many heroic scenes from war movies. Think about the tremendous joy the wounded man has when he realizes someone has come back for him. We could be the one sheep as opposed to the 99. I myself owe so much to Jesus because he came back to get me.

Church health

Jesus didn't even consider the option that the shepherd could just get a replacement sheep and move on. The servant leader is very concerned with evangelism, but knows that it must be accomplished at home first. He is concerned with the true growth of the congregation. He is not satisfied with a dynamic stability, where the number of people who don't come back are balanced by those who are new. The servant leaders are the ones trying to get the weak back, to gather the drifters.

The church suffers because we let the weak go instead of trying to strengthen them. The shepherd did not weed out the sick lambs, but poured oil over their wounds and did his best to nurse them back to health. The church is not like a chain, as weak as its weakest link. When we lose someone the whole suffers. The bell indeed tolls for us.

The servant leader does not send someone else to help, or develop a program to try to meet these needs. He goes himself. I see the servant leader coming to help me in my time of need. How would you feel if the President of the United States came to help you with a personal problem? It would be amazing. But it sure would be true servant leadership.

Leading from the Background

We might wonder how we can spot this kind of servant leader. He may be hard to see; he may blend into the background. Lenin once said that a true leader must submerge himself in the fountain of the people. This doesn't mean that he is invisible, but that he is here with us, and not a general who directs from afar. But if there was a time when God announced the heroes of the faith at this congregation, you might not even recognize many of the names. And if you think that you might be called, it's likely that you won't. Like an iceberg; the vast amount of good is done by those working in behind the scenes.

Who do you see that is doing this? It may be someone way in the background who is quietly working to round up drifters and encourage and strengthen them. It may be that the elders or teachers are doing it. The real question is, are we doing it?

Conclusion

Relationships

The really important thing is our relationships. There is a movie that I love with Gene Wilder and Harrison Ford called "The Cisco Kid." In it, Gene Wilder plays a rabbi from Poland who has struggled to learn the law. A synagogue in San Francisco asks him to come there and he agrees. The long, hard journey across America, though, could not be completed without the help of a new-found friend played by Harrison Ford. Robbers pursue them and catch up to them on the Pacific coast. In the struggle that ensues, Harrison Ford is shot, the copy of the Torah which the rabbi has faithfully carried with him is perilously close to the fire, and the remaining bandit is about to shoot Harrison Ford again. Gene Wilder has an agonizing moment when he has to make a choice, then he rushes to get the Torah out of the fire. He later is able to save Ford by shooting the assailant, but later as the two friends eat in a restaurant, Wilder is clearly disturbed. When asked why, he moans, "I cared more for a piece of paper (meaning the Torah) than I did for my best friend!" This is the heart of legalism, and is one of the causes of our lack of servant leadership. But the lack of the proper relationship is the root of the problem. The rabbi in this movie learned the law in Poland, but he learned love and friendship on his way west.

Even though Christ was equal to God, he came gently, offering love and service (Phillipians 2:5-8). Many have followed him, and the world has been changed by him. We will do the best if we, as we read in Phillipians 2:3, think of others as better than ourselves. This was in the mind of Christ, and helps make him such a great servant leader.

Jesus himself told us in Matthew 20:28, "I came not to be served, but to serve." His service has not really been understood or appreciated by us since. What can we say that we came for? We must always strive to comfort others by being there for them as Christ is for us. We must (not seek the

popularity and glory of ministry to the big crowds but) be involved with a one-on-one service of love to those who need it the most. The church exists to extend the servant leadership of Christ to all