

# Are you a True and Faithful Servant?

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The gospel of Matthew records an event in which Jesus gave a profound but often misunderstood lesson about greatness. During the final weeks of the Messiah's public ministry, the mother of James and John approached Him, accompanied by her sons and made a very special request.

Then came to Him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping Him, and desiring a certain thing of Him. And He said unto her, "What wilt thou?" She saith unto Him, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on the left, in Thy kingdom." (Mt. 20:20-21)

Salome's desire for her children to have positions of great prominence in the Kingdom is natural. After all, who wouldn't want his or her children to be successful in life? And how much more successful could one be than to sit next to the King of kings for all eternity?

However, Salome's desire for James and John to enjoy positions of great power may have come from more than simply love for her children. She may have seen them as the most qualified for such positions. Consider the qualifications of these two disciples.

First, they were very close to Jesus. The gospels indicate that James and John along with Peter witnessed several events the other apostles were not privy to. For example, they were eyewitnesses to the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-9), an event that actually took them in vision into God's millennial Kingdom. Additionally, they were with Jesus when He raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mk.5:36-43). These two disciples were also with Jesus in one of His most intimate moments. They, along with Peter, accompanied Jesus into the garden of Gethsemane just hours before the crucifixion (Mt.26:36-37).

James and John clearly enjoyed a closeness with Jesus that was apparent even to the other disciples. John is characterized in scripture as "the disciple Jesus loved" (Jn. 20:2) He was the one who leaned on Jesus' breast and asked Jesus for the identity of the one who would betray Him (Jn.13:20-26). James was a leading instrument in raising up the New Testament Church and he is the first disciple to have been martyred (Acts12:1-2).

James and John may also have had abilities that uniquely qualified them as leaders among the disciples. Most authorities believe they were from a family of substance and as such, were part of an educated class. It is interesting that aside from the apostle Paul, John is the most prolific New Testament author.

Additionally, John's writings contain deep and profound spiritual insights found nowhere else in the scriptures. For example, John introduces his gospel by describing Jesus prior to His coming in the flesh. In this description, John identifies Jesus as "the Word" (Logos), or Spokesman. He stated that this Word was a companion of God and a member of the God Family.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (Jn. 1:1-5)

John also recorded Jesus meeting with Nicodemus and His teaching regarding being born again (Jn. 3:1-8). Additionally, John's gospel contains a detailed transcript of Jesus' farewell discourse on the way to Gethsemane (Jn. 15 and 16) as well as the powerful prayer Jesus spoke shortly before His arrest (Jn. 17). Jesus' teaching about the connection between love and obedience to God's law filled the pages of John's writings in a way that is unmatched by any other New Testament author.

So unique is the content of John's gospel that although it describes Jesus' life in considerable detail, it is not considered a synoptic gospel by most scholars.

Clearly, the wife of Zebedee believed her sons possessed the qualifications necessary to share the highest seat of government in the Kingdom. With this in mind, she advanced her petition to Jesus.

Grant that my sons would sit on your right hand and left in the kingdom. (Mat. 20:21)

## The King Answers

Jesus responded to Salome's request by first informing her that she did not comprehend what she was asking. This was because her vision of authority and power was vastly different from that shared by God the Father and Jesus Christ. Jesus then gathered the disciples together and gave them a profound lesson regarding authority and greatness.

But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant..." (Mt. 20:25-27)

Throughout the scriptures, God declares the importance of being a servant. He often identifies great champions of the Bible as His servants. But what did Jesus mean by the word "servant"? And how can you know if you are truly living up to God's standard as a true and faithful servant?

## A Willing Servant

The Greek word for "servant" used by Matthew when recording Jesus' words is *doulos*. This word can be translated as "slave" or someone in "subjection or subservience." However, *doulos* can mean a form of subjection that can be voluntary as well as involuntary. It is the same word used by the apostle Paul when describing Jesus Christ.

... But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men...(Phil. 2:7)

At this point, it is important to understand that Jesus was not forced into the role of a servant but rather assumed that role voluntarily. Every part of His life, including His crucifixion, was done without coercion. Jesus willingly surrendered Himself to the will of the Father. His own words stand as proof of this fact.

I can of Mine own Self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father Which hath sent me. (Jn. 5:30)

Jesus' words declare that He sought the will of the Father. That will was not forced on Him. The gospels proclaim that Jesus' entire life was dedicated to honoring His Father. At one point in His ministry, Jesus explained to His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of Him That sent me and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34). In order to do the will of the Father, Jesus had put into subjection His own will.

Perhaps the most graphic demonstration of Jesus' submission to the will of the Father came on the eve of His crucifixion. While in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed with great intensity that, if it were possible, His Father would remove "the cup" containing the horror of His impending crucifixion. However, He then declared, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done" (Lk. 22:42). Jesus then went on to lay down His life so that man could be reconciled to the Father (Rom. 5:10). Jesus truly was the perfect example of a servant.

## Champions of Service

The Bible identifies men and women who obeyed God and surrendered their will to Him. By doing so, they earned the distinction of being called a servant of God. Moses is one example. The book of Hebrews

indicates that Moses rejected the pleasures associated with power and chose instead to suffer with the children of Israel.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. (Heb. 11:24-26)

God clearly understood Moses' attitude as one of service and for this reason, He used Moses in a great way to fulfill His purpose for Israel. God also specifically identified a special relationship between Himself and Moses. He even warned Israel to refrain from speaking out against "My servant Moses" (Nu. 12:7-8).

This attitude of Godly service can also be seen in great champions of the faith such as Joseph, Daniel, and David. Each of these men looked beyond their own struggle and saw something greater driving their lives. Additionally, the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews identifies other great heroes of faith who willingly surrendered their will to God and His authority over them. In order to be a true and faithful servant of God one must voluntarily subordinate their will to the will of the Father, but how?

## What is a Servant?

The Bible clearly states that a servant is one who is in subjection and obedient to someone or something. The apostle Paul illustrated this principle in his epistle to the Church at Rome.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Rom. 6:16)

Paul's words indicate that obedience is a critical element of being a servant. Therefore, a servant of God would be one who obeys God's law and submits to God's authority in his or her life.

It is important to understand that just because someone claims to be God's servant does not mean it is so. This is because many who claim this distinction do so in word only. In other words, many people, including those in the ministry, believe that obedience to God's law is not an essential element in the Christian walk. The apostle John once warned of a false Christianity in which people would assert their commitment to God but would in fact not honor His commandments.

And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that says "I know Him," and keeps not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him... (1Jn 2:3-5)

John went on to say that the love of God is reflected in the keeping of His commandments and that His commandments are not burdensome (1Jn. 5:3).

Jesus also indicated that it was possible for man to practice a false form of Christianity. At the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus described those who claimed to be Christian but would not enter into His Kingdom.

Not every one that saith unto Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, "I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." (Mt. 7:21-22)

The word "iniquity" used by Jesus is better translated "lawlessness." In other words, Jesus was saying that in order to be a part of God's Kingdom, a person must submit to His law. Clearly, those described in the Bible as God's servants would have to be obedient to Him and honor His commandments. To do so, God's servants would have to know His commandments.

Today, many claiming to be Christians trivialize God's law or reject it altogether. Some contend that Christ did away with the commandments. Others believe the law was only applicable in the Old Testament and grace frees Christians from honoring God's commandments. One leading minister in a church with a worldwide membership scoffingly characterized God's law as "one straw in one brick of a great building." In other words, it's there, but it doesn't mean much. Jesus' opinion of God's law was quite different. When giving the Sermon on the Mount, He expressed it this way:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. (Mt. 5:17-18)

The gospel of Matthew records an event in which Jesus was approached by a man who asked Him, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Jesus responded by saying, "... if you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt. 19:17). Jesus believed in the commandments and it is clear that those who are God's true and faithful servants will obey His law.

The key to obeying God's law is to see it for what it is – a great moral code that not only defines sin but also defines love (Mt. 22:36-40; Rom. 13:10). The great heroes in the Bible loved God's law. King David expressed that kind of love when he said, "Your law is my delight" (Psa. 119:174).

## The Work of a Servant

True and faithful servants of God honor His word and His commandments. However, as servants, they also do His work. Jesus once told His disciples, "I must do the work of Him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4). Earlier, Jesus said that He must not only do the will of the Father, but "finish His work" (Jn. 4:34).

It is important to understand that Jesus had a work. That work included revealing the Father (Mt. 11:27), preaching the gospel of the Kingdom (Lk. 4:43), establishing His Church (Mt. 16:18), calling sinners to repentance (Lk. 5:32), confirming the promises made unto the fathers (Rom. 15:8), and redeeming man from the consequences of sin (1Jn. 3:5). These are just some of the things Jesus was given to do as a work. Throughout His life, Jesus did the will and the work of His Father and His true and faithful servants will do no different.

## What is the Work?

Throughout history, God's servants have been given a work to accomplish. Noah was commissioned to be a preacher of righteousness as well as to build an ark which would preserve life from being destroyed by a great flood. Abraham was commissioned to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land which would ultimately be the home of Israel.

Moses was commissioned to lead Israel out of Egypt and build a nation united under God's law. Joshua was commissioned to lead Israel into a land of promise. Ezra and Nehemiah had a work involving the building of God's temple. The prophets were commissioned to cry aloud and indict Israel and Judah for their disobedience as well as to proclaim the ultimate destiny of God's people. John the Baptist was commissioned to preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins and to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. All the servants of God had a work and a work continues to this very day.

## Jesus Leaves a Work

During His life on earth, Jesus had a specific work given to Him by the Father. The scriptures reveal Jesus finished that work. While praying to His Father shortly before His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus announced:

I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gave Me to do.  
(Jn. 17:4)

Jesus' last utterance on the cross before commending His spirit to God was, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). With these words, Jesus was declaring that He had successfully completed the work His Father had given Him.

However, it is important to understand that although Jesus had completed the work He was given, He also left a work to His apostles and those who would follow after them. That work would continue until the day of His return to earth. Jesus' own words reveal this truth: "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Lk. 12:43).

## Two-Fold Commission

The scriptures reveal two great works Jesus commissioned His disciples to do after He ascended to the Father. The first commission was to preach the gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations. So important was this commission, that Jesus declared the Kingdom of God would not be restored on earth until it was completed.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come. (Mt. 24:14)

The proclaiming of God's Kingdom by the apostles began on the day of Pentecost in 31 A.D. (Acts 2) and continues to this very day. It will culminate with the appearance of two witnesses who will have great power and will testify against all the nations on earth (Rev. 11:3-6).

## Feed My Sheep

The second commission concerns the nurturing of God's children. The Gospel of John reveals that after Jesus was risen from the dead, he met with His disciples and gave them special instructions regarding the great work that lay ahead of them. At one point, Jesus spoke personally to Peter and indicated that if Peter truly loved him, he would take care of God's children.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" He saith unto Him, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He saith unto him, "Feed My lambs." He saith to him again the second time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" He saith unto Him, "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He saith unto him, "Feed My sheep." He saith unto him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?" Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, "Lovest thou Me?" And he said unto Him, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." Jesus saith unto him, "Feed My sheep." (Jn. 21:15-17)

With the words "feed My sheep," Jesus was announcing the second great commission given to His New Testament servants. The importance of nurturing God's people cannot be overstated. God's people need to be fed in order to sustain them in their Christian walk. The apostle Paul, when writing to the Church at Rome, said, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). It is for this reason that God established the ministry. The purpose of that ministry is to "edify the saints," not to edify the ministry. By feeding Jesus' sheep, God's servants are preparing them for a future in His Kingdom.

## How Do They Serve?

It is important to understand that those who are called God's servants are not simply the leaders of His people. God's entire family is a family of servants. He even designed within His Church a symbiotic relationship in which each of His children could profoundly affect one another and thus affect the entire body. It is for this reason that He placed a variety of positions within the Church. The apostle Paul characterized God's Church as "fitly joined together and compacted" (Eph. 4:16).

Those who are truly servants seize opportunities to advance the cause of God's Kingdom. While some preach the gospel as a witness, others finance that gospel message through tithes and offerings. While some anoint the sick with oil, others pray for the sick and offer words of encouragement. While some teach God's word, others visit the widows and orphans.

The point in service is that God has made it possible for every one of His children to reflect His way. Those who are genuinely dedicated to being servants are able to identify opportunities to serve God's people and in doing so, reflect what God intended for all mankind.

## An Example of Service

It is important to understand that God does not simply want His children to "pay and pray." He desires His children to take active roles in serving the needs of His family. Consider how God describes pure religion.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (Jas. 1:27)

Jesus once said that if someone gave just a cup of cold water to one of God's children, it would not go unnoticed by the Father (Mt. 10:42). The point He was making is that there is no act of kindness that He and the Father do not consider and value. There are so many ways for God's children to serve His people.

Consider the following. There was a woman who lived on the west coast with her family. This family often struggled to make ends meet. Physically, this mother and wife was not well. She was in constant pain and often found it difficult to get around. So, an obvious question one might ask is: "What can this woman possibly do to serve others?" Her resources, both physical and financial, were so limited. This is true, but this child of God had two extraordinary gifts: 1) she was very artistic, and 2) she had a heart that was filled with hope.

Armed with these two gifts, she would make simple yet beautiful greeting cards and write letters of encouragement to people around the world. One of her signature cards had a famous cartoon character on it. Next to the character, she would write a humorous thought as if it were being expressed by the character himself. Inside the card was a letter of encouragement and hope. Throughout the years, this woman sent out virtually thousands of cards conveying her encouragement and prayers.

This act of service, though simple, stands as a noble offering to the God she serves and was profoundly appreciated by those who were touched by her special gift. This is only one of thousands of stories where God's children act in His behalf and in His service.

## The Heart of a Servant

In order to reflect an attitude of Godly service, one must have the heart of a servant. That heart must express true outgoing concern for others. The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Church at Philippi, expressed it this way:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem [the] other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

This attitude of genuine outgoing concern for others is a signature of a true and faithful servant of God. It is driven not by self-interest, but by love. When writing to the Church at Corinth, Paul expressed that kind of love.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up... (1Cor. 13:4)

## A Lesson from John the Baptist

John the Baptist stands as one of the great heroes of the New Testament. His fierce devotion to God and His way was illustrated in both his words and deeds. One of the greatest examples of humility and service ever recorded in scripture was demonstrated by John.

During the beginning stages of Jesus' ministry, some of John's disciples came to him and complained that Jesus was attracting a greater following than John.

And they came unto John, and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him. (Jn. 3:26)

When John heard this, his response was not to formulate some strategy to combat the newly emerging competition. On the contrary, John recognized his role and humbly acknowledged that it was his time to diminish in significance and Jesus' time to emerge. He also expressed a sense of great joy over the news brought by his disciples.

John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." (Jn. 3:27-30)

These words clearly demonstrate that John was not interested in self-promotion but rather in surrendering to God's will.

## The Attitude of a Servant

It is tragic, but today, many who call themselves God's servants place themselves in positions of great power and demand that they be served. Words such as "government" and "authority" are used not for the edification of the saints, but rather to subjugate them. This was a common practice among the Pharisees during Jesus' life.

Just days before His crucifixion, Jesus leveled a scathing indictment against the arrogance of these religious leaders. He characterized them as loving "the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogue" (Mt. 23:6). Jesus went on to say that true greatness is defined by humility and service. He then predicted that the time would come when those who exalted themselves would be abased and those who humbled themselves would be exalted (Mt. 23:11-12).

## A Lesson in Greatness

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus met with His apostles and kept His last Passover. As they sat down to eat, His disciples began arguing among themselves over which of them should be accounted the

greatest. This was not the first time the disciples engaged in arguments concerning self-promotion. As was explained earlier, James and John once enlisted the help of their mother to appeal to Jesus to allow them to sit at His side in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-21).

It is hard to imagine how disappointing this attitude was to Jesus during the final hours of His life. However, He used this dispute to teach a powerful lesson about greatness. Consider the words of this great King and Savior.

And He said unto them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For which is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as he that serves..." (Lk. 22:25-27)

Upon speaking these words, Jesus wrapped a towel around Himself, poured water into a basin, and proceeded to kneel before His own disciples and wash their feet (Jn. 13:5). Jesus then explained to His disciples how His followers should treat the position of a servant.

Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Mt. 11:28-29)

## Servants of Our God

Who are the true and faithful servants of God? They are those who have voluntarily surrendered their will to Him. Those in this esteemed company love God's law and honor His commandments. And as servants, they have dedicated their lives to finishing the work God has given them.

Additionally, these children of God have the heart of a servant. They seek not their own honor, but rather esteem others greater than themselves. They look to the example of Jesus Christ as the perfect servant and strive to follow that example.

True and faithful servants of God see their role not as a chore, but rather as a position of honor and distinction. They are not only servants now, but also aspire to be servants in God's Kingdom.

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