

Quality of Service

Isaiah 2:6-17; John 13:12-20; 1st Corinthians 9:3-12



We have been in revival. There was a reason for our preparation, as there is a reason we must carry on forward now. Whether or not we have had revival depends mostly on what we do with it now. Will we allow our lives to be transformed? If so, how?

Shakespeare reminded us in *Merchant of Venice* that some things that cannot be forced. Some of the most important attributes and attitudes of life cannot be coerced. They cannot be effectively mandated or enacted by power and intimidation. They are attitudes that must flow freely from the heart. While Shakespeare speaks of mercy, the import of his words applies just as well to gospel service.

Mercy is unselfish. It looks not to one's own needs and desires, but to the needs of others. It

*The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice
bless'd;
It blesses him that gives and him that
takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his
crown,
His scepter shows the force of temporal
power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of*

*kings;
But mercy is above this scepter'd sway,—
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest
God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore,
Jew,—
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to
render
The deeds of mercy.¹*

sets one's personal needs and desires aside in consideration for another. It is this quality of mercy that should likewise characterize our lives as servants of Jesus Christ, who gave himself that we might live in fellowship with God from now through eternity.

Isaiah contrasts pride with humility. He reminded Judah that one of their greatest needs in serving God was to humble themselves. They needed to remember their need to serve *Yahweh*, and *Yahweh* alone. Rather than serving God faithfully, they were enamored of themselves and with the idols of their own creation. Their lives revolved around issues of self, as that is the underlying focus of idol worship.

Idolatry replaces God with the attitude of "What can I get out of life?" Such an attitude places self at the center of one's existence, demanding that the world bow to the individual's dreams and desires. One worships an idol rather than God, in hopes that this idol might be manipulated to serve petty desires. Idolatry come very close to the materialistic focus of so many in our churches who would equate material advancement with God's blessing. A prosperity gospel advocated by popular books such

¹ William Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene i.
<http://www.TheoTrek.org/sermons/index.shtml>

as *The Prayer of Jabez*² and *Your Best Life Now*³ disguises self-advancement in God-talk, but ignores the basics of the Biblical message of humble service. They exchange the concept of serving God and others for the getting God to serve our material dreams. At heart, their message is one of self-serving pride, rather than humility for serving others.

In 1st Corinthians, Paul contrasts privilege and rights with serving others with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's words run so counter the mandates of our culture and egocentric society. We seek to meet our own needs in order to meet the needs of others out of our abundance. Paul speaks of setting aside our rights and due privileges to place the needs of others ahead of our own.

Paul would be a failure in Joel Osteen's book. Time Warner classifies Osteen's book under self-actualization—religious aspects. Such a classification would be foreign to Paul's writings. Paul did not seek advancement and material blessing. He did not seek prominence and a life of ease. These are on the order of what he classified as refuse in Philippians 3. Rather, he relinquished rightful compensation in his teaching ministry as becoming a hindrance to carrying out the ministry to which God had called him. He determined that he would serve Jesus Christ by ministering to the needs of others. In the course of his service, he would allow God to meet his needs.

He did not focus on self, but on the needs of others. He did not demand that his needs be met, but lay his all on the line that he might bless those around him. It was this attitude of self-denial and humble service that became God's avenue of blessing Paul. Sure, the Corinthians still should have met his physical needs. They were still responsible for sharing their material wealth with those who served them faithfully. His responsibility, however, was not to press the agenda of his own needs, but to meet the needs of others, being faithful in service to Christ Jesus.

Jesus had every right and every human reason to expect the disciples to serve him. He had every reason to have expected one of them to have washed his feet. They felt themselves somehow above this menial task, yet Jesus stripped himself to demonstrate true humility, service, and indeed greatness. Their definitions for service and greatness were dashed to the ground with this simple act of menial service.

Jesus did not come to this world to serve himself. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Jesus came to give his life in order that we might live. The whole of his life and ministry was devoted to fulfill this mission beyond issues of his own comfort. His words to the disciples remind us of Isaiah's call to humility. We must remember that we are not above the one we call Lord. If Jesus did not live to serve himself and his own comfort, why would we? Rather, he took a towel and the position of a lowly servant to perform menial tasks of humble service.

A servant is not greater than his master. We are all called to be servants of Christ Jesus. Some we set apart as examples to lead in service. Our primary example, however, is that of Christ. Honest service is not forced, it flows from an inner attitude of humility. Will we rise to his measure of merciful and humble service? Will our lives echo the quality of Jesus' loving service to a lost world?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

² Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life*. Multnomah Publishers: Sisters, Oregon, 2000.

³ Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*. Time Warner: NY, 2004.