

The Significance of Being a Servant

One of the highest compliments the Almighty has ever given any man is to call someone, “My servant.” He pronounced this beautiful title upon Abraham (Gen. 26:24), Moses (Num. 12:7-8), Caleb (Num. 14:24), David (2 Sam. 3:18), the prophets (2 Kings 9:7), Job (Job 1:8), Isaiah (Isa. 20:3) and Jesus (Isa. 42:1).

Just as importantly, Jesus thought of Himself as being a servant. He said, “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Elsewhere He affirmed, “I always do those things that please [My Father]” (John 8:29b). After washing the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper, Jesus said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15). Jesus Christ was so commonly identified as a Servant that His own disciples referred to Him as, “Your Holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:30).

Early Christians indeed followed the example of Jesus and nearly always referred to themselves as servants of God. This was not mere rhetoric, but a deeply ingrained sense of identity: “Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1); “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:1); “James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Jas. 1:1); “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1); “Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ and brother of James” (Jude 1). Early Christians clearly embraced the idea that they had become slaves to God (Rom. 6:16-22).

Jesus taught that greatness can only be found in humble service to others (Matt. 20:26), and He left an example for Christians to follow in this regard (1 Pet. 2:21-25). What lessons are Christians to glean from all these facts?

If we are not serving, we are not really following Christ – Jesus explicitly taught that part of the basis for our final judgment would be whether we have visited the sick, clothed the naked, fed the hungry, comforted the imprisoned and welcomed the stranger (Matt. 25:34-40). Christians are to do good to all, especially those who are of the household of the faith (Gal. 6:10). If we are not serving, we are not following Him.

Being a servant is to be part of our self-identity – When someone asks, “Who are you?” a variety of answers may be given. However, it seems highly significant that early Christians often had no trouble putting their service to God at the top of the list. Christians are commanded to, “reckon” and “present” themselves to be servants of God (Rom. 6:11, 13, 22).

Jesus Christ is glorified in us when we serve like Him – Paul said that he wanted to follow Christ so closely that he might, “share in His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). The purpose of our lives in Christ is to be conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:27; 1 Pet. 2:21). Jesus is truly glorified in us when we choose to lovingly serve like Him. **--JB**