



“Servanthood” Luke 22:24-30

Idea: Servanthood is the nature of Christ’s Kingdom.

Intro: On January 15, 2009, US Airways flight #1549 departed New York City’s LaGuardia Airport. Shortly after takeoff, the plane collided with a flock of geese, taking out both engines. Captain Sully Sullenberg made an emergency landing in the chilly waters of the Hudson River. Before he left the plane and got to safety, he walked the plane twice to make sure no one was onboard. As the captain, he knew that he must be the last person off the plane. “Sully” became a national hero.

Three years later, nearly to the date, on January 13, 2012, a massive Italian cruise ship called the *Costa Concordia* crashed off the coast of Tuscany and started to sink. The investigation that ensued determined the cause of the crash to be the fault of the ship’s captain. Francesco Schettino was trying to impress a younger female dancer on board, and he veered too close to danger. The ship struck an underwater rock formation that caused the *Costa Concordia* to take on water, sinking the ship with its 4,000-plus passengers on board.

In the confusion and chaos, Schettino escaped in a lifeboat before everyone else had made it off the ship. A coast guard member angrily told him on the phone to “Get back on board, d--- it.” Schettino later claimed that he fell into a lifeboat because the ship was listing to one side, but the evidence told a different story. So, the court refused to believe his story. Instead, he was found guilty of manslaughter, causing a shipwreck, and abandoning the ship with passengers on board. Schettino was sentenced to ten years in prison. He became a global disgrace.

These two events and the leaders involved depict two opposing perspectives of leadership. I believe it is safe to say that one man portrayed good leadership and the other poor leadership. Captain Sullenberg focused on his passengers and crew, making sure each of them reached safety before he thought of exiting the plane himself. Captain Schettino focused on himself, fleeing the ship long before the passengers and crew made it safely off.

Leadership is crucial to success in any arena of life. Field Marshal Sir Bernard Law Montgomery was one of Britain’s greatest military leaders during WWII. Therefore, he was more than qualified to list the qualities necessary to a leader in war. According to Montgomery, such a leader should see the big picture and not become bogged down in details. He must not be petty. He must choose men well. He should trust those under him and let them get on with their jobs without interference. He must have the power of clear decision. He should inspire confidence. Finally, he must have a proper sense of religious truth and acknowledge it to the troops.

Those are the leadership qualifications necessary for a military commander according to Montgomery. When it comes to business and organizational leadership, John Maxwell lists out what he calls twenty-one indispensable qualities of a leader. They are character, charisma, commitment, communication, competence, courage, discernment, focus, generosity, initiative, listening, passion, positive attitude, problem solving, relationships, responsibility, security, self-discipline, servanthood, teachability, and vision. Then, J. Oswald Sanders, in his book *Spiritual Leadership*, offers eight essential qualities of a leader. His list includes discipline, vision, wisdom, decision, courage, humility, integrity, and sincerity. These lists, and many like them, contain qualities every church overseer should possess. Shepherding God's people, however, demands far more because the issue is not just organizational leadership, but a moral and spiritual example.

One of the things every good leader must understand and practice is the art of service. The next passage in our journey through Luke showcases servant leadership. Jesus presents His life and ministry as the supreme example for how those who follow Him ought to approach life. He is addressing His eleven disciples who are gathered with Him around the Passover Meal. At this point, Judas Iscariot has left to betray the Lord into the hands of the chief priests (John 13:27). The disciples would carry on His gospel mission through the Church after Jesus' ascension, so they would need to learn and mimic the servanthood of Christ. They were, however, far from Jesus' example, but this teaching was not exclusive to them. It speaks to every follower of Christ past, present, and future. We discover in these verses that servanthood is the nature of Christ's Kingdom.

Read Luke 22:24-30.

Inquiry: In the times of these events, darkness begins to fill the minds of all who understood what was to happen. When the Lord mentioned suffering (vs. 15) and said His betrayer was among them (vs. 21), undoubtedly darkness entered the room. The disciples wonder to themselves who would cross the Lord. What an awkward dinner-table conversation! Can you imagine your rabbi saying to you once again that He will suffer because one of you sold Him out? Hearing this, they deny the charge and begin to eyeball one another.

Then, amazingly, their conversation moves from denying they would betray Jesus to arguing which of them was the greatest (vs. 24). In their haste to deny their culpability in the upcoming betrayal, they laud their achievements and privilege with the Lord. Pride is such a blinding and dangerous sin. The disciples are actually disputing the Lord's replacement before He is even gone.

Jesus graciously responds to their dispute. He clarifies that Kingdom life encompasses two things: service and solidarity. The Lord makes it clear that life and leadership in the Kingdom does not look like life and leadership in the sinful world. Instead, servanthood is the nature of Christ's Kingdom. There are two things for us to see and understand about servanthood.

1. Servanthood follows the posture of the King. (vs. 26-27)

As the disciples observed the Passover Meal with the Lord Jesus, it was a holy experience. The sacredness of it, however, quickly dissipated as they began to argue over their position in the Kingdom. By engaging in such a debate, the disciples exemplified their worldliness. They were acting just like those who had rejected Jesus (vs. 25). Those with a secular mindset strive to rule one another in power-hungry and power-grabbing pride. They give themselves fancy titles like "Benefactor," "Your Grace," and "Your Royal Highness."

This self-serving outlook has no place among the citizens of the Kingdom (vs. 26). It is antithetical to the Kingdom, and we know this because King Jesus never promoted Himself or fought for position. He very well was within His rights, as the writer of Hebrews points out, to claim and demand authority, recognition, allegiance, and worship. Read Hebrews 1:1-3a.

Paul magnifies the servanthood of Jesus in his letter to the Philippians. Read Philippians 2:1-11.

Paul calls on believers to model the mindset and lifestyle of King Jesus. Rather than living life in selfish ambition and conceit, we are to humbly regard others as more significant than ourselves and serve them. We are to pursue this posture because it was and is the posture of the King. He emptied Himself, setting aside His royal title and rights, to be born into this world as a man for the purpose of serving sinful humanity. All throughout the Gospels, Jesus' posture is portrayed as one of servanthood from the cradle to the grave.

- Jesus would save His people from their sins (Matt 1:21).
- Jesus healed the sick (Luke 4:38-39)
- Jesus ministered to the hurting (Luke 7:11-17).
- Jesus loved the sinful (Luke 7:36-50).
- Jesus fed the hungry (Mark 6:30-44).
- Jesus loved His persecutors (Luke 23:34).

Jesus never sought prominence or prestige. He never sought out the chief place at the dinner table or required others to wait on Him. Rather, Jesus preferred to dress in a servant's uniform and attend to the guests. He is the Lord of the table, but He is the kind of Lord who wraps a towel around His waist and washes the feet of others (John 13:3-5). Jesus is, in His own words, the *"One who serves"* (vs. 27). You see, the posture of the King and those of His Kingdom is servanthood. In a world full of people who would argue for their own greatness based on age, class, privilege, ethnicity, gender, education, and almost anything else, the Lord shines bright as the One who forsakes all those prejudices and entitlements and spends His life for others. He turns the world upside down with His emphasis on servanthood. Therefore, in the Kingdom, the greatest people are the greatest servants.

As we seek to model this posture, let us make sure that it is first formed in our personal lives. Let us strive to serve others and not seek to be served. When we gather weekly, let us come to the church to serve rather than to be served. Sure, we all want to be blessed when gathering with the church, but we should first desire to be a blessing to others in the church. Our Sunday morning experience must not be one of consumerism. We dare not wonder what we can get, but instead let us think about what we can give. This posture should be true of us personally, and it should be true of those who lead us in the church. As Jesus explains this posture to the disciples, He is speaking to the men who would soon lead His church. Leaders in the church (elders, deacons, small group leaders, committee members, ministry team leaders) must exemplify the posture of servanthood. It is the nature of the Kingdom.

2. Servanthood embraces the promise of the Kingdom. (vs. 28-30)

Jesus looked beyond the temporal world to the Kingdom of Heaven. I believe one of the reasons, Christian people are tempted to fight for promotion and prestige in this world is because they do not understand what awaits them in heaven. Jesus closed His lesson on servanthood by reminding the eleven disciples of their future reward in the Kingdom. What He says is nothing but amazing. These men had shown weakness and had failed the Lord many times since being called into His service. They were about to experience their greatest failure. They all would that very night scatter and deny they even knew Jesus (Matt 26:56b). In spite of this, Jesus commends the disciples for their solidarity. They had stayed with Him through His trials, so He reminded them of what awaited them in the Kingdom. The disciples would enjoy intimate and eternal fellowship with Christ while joining Him in His rule and reign over the New Heavens and New Earth.

Jesus made this promise to the eleven. While it is first a specific pledge to them as the justices who will judge the tribes of Israel, it is also a pledge to the Church. John explains this reality in Revelation 5:9-10. Believers will reign with Christ on earth one day. Therefore, Christians should have no problem being servants today, knowing we will sit on thrones in the fullness of the Kingdom. For that matter,

our faithful service today is preparing us for the rewards we shall receive on that day. Jesus is the example, first the cross and then the crown.

As we contemplate this reality, we should not mistake it as mere pragmatism. We dare not serve others simply for the rewards awaiting us in heaven. If we do, then our service becomes selfishness. It becomes cloaked humility and a false spirituality. Instead, we serve others for the glory of God and the good of the ones being served, and we allow the promise of the Kingdom to encourage us during the times of trial and tribulation. Rather, than being short-sighted and only seeing this world, we keep our eyes downrange and remember the goodness that awaits us in the Kingdom. We can serve others well when this is our perspective. We can invest and spend ourselves on behalf of others when we embrace the promise of the Kingdom. This is the nature of the Kingdom.

Conclusion: Captain Sully became a national hero after landing his plane in the chilly waters of the Hudson River. All of this was because he courageously and safely landed his plane in the Hudson River and then walked it twice to make sure no one was onboard before leaving. He put his passengers and crew before himself. Conversely, Captain Schettino became a global disgrace because served himself rather than his passengers and crew. The story of Captain Sully and flight #1549 is remarkable. A movie was made about Sully's heroism and selflessness. It, however, pales in comparison to all that Jesus has done for humanity. He humbled Himself to the point of being nailed to a cross, serving sinners by giving His life as a ransom. Therefore, God the Father has exalted Him and given Him a name that is above all other names. It is the name of Jesus that every knee will bow before. It is the name of Jesus that redeems sinners. It is the name of Jesus who receives all glory in heaven and on earth. The name of Jesus is great and powerful, and it was won through service.

As His people, let us spend ourselves in service and solidarity to His name and mission. Let us remember that servanthood follows the posture of the King and embraces the promise of the Kingdom. As such, let us be intentional in our relationships, seeking out ways to serve our family, neighbors, coworkers, friends, and church members while keeping our eyes downrange to the return of the King and the fullness of His Kingdom.