

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: The King Who Served

Serving Like Jesus; No One Serves Like Jesus

(Mark 1:1-10:45)

Study #1

Introduction: Jesus, the VIP servant...

American author F. Scott Fitzgerald started off his book, The Rich Boy, with the line, *“Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me.”*

Ernest Hemingway wrote in a reply, *“Yes. They have more money.”*

But, it’s more than money. A quick browse on the Internet proves that, truly, the rich are not like the rest of us.

I discovered:

- that there is a VIP private terminal for the very rich at the Los Angeles International Airport that features private beds, massages, and peace & quiet, far away from the mad rush that ordinary travelers endure;
- a training regimen for people who work on multi-million dollar “superyachts” that includes special emphasis on towel-folding, pillow placement, table-setting, polishing the TV remote, being present while invisible, and personal hygiene (always look and smell fresh);
- A family who used their second home for their German shepherds;
- an A-list stars’ eight-year old daughter wearing a \$2,000 raincoat.

I could go on.

Extreme pampering is the lot of some - not all - famous athletes, Hollywood stars, media moguls, and politicians. They get silly, over-the-top service

The rich and the famous don’t usually wash their own cars, mow their own ~~yards~~ estates, do their own laundry. For goodness sakes, they have people for these things.

That’s the way it is today in the US, around the world, and throughout time. The powerful get VIP treatment.

The Bible tells us that Jesus of Nazareth was the pre-eminent VIP. He is Lord and King. He is referred to as “King of kings and Lord of lords”. He is the Sovereign, Messiah, Christ.

Further, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, equal, one, with His heavenly Father.

If anyone has ever been a Very Important Person, it’s Jesus. If anyone ever deserved VIP treatment, Jesus did. And Jesus was the exception to the rule for rulers. He came to serve.

This morning is the Sunday before the Sunday before Easter. So, it makes perfect sense for us to focus on Jesus. Today, I’m looking at a particular aspect of Jesus’ life that I hope will serve as a lens to help us understand Him, His calling on us, and His own mission.

The word for today is *servant*.

We’ll look at some of the most well-known episodes in Jesus’ life and will see the jarring inconsistency between the Person Jesus is (Lord, King) and the orientation to service He brought to His life.

This morning, we’ll be in the Gospel of Mark (there are four Gospels in the New Testament) and will start with a scene of Jesus at supper with some friends.

Jesus - Modeling Service to All

Serving the Least, the Last, the Lost

Matthew and friends... (2:13-17)

The friends with whom Jesus was enjoying a meal are new friends. First, they were friends of Matthew (or Levi) the tax-collector.

Matthew had only recently started following Jesus. But once he got to know a bit about Jesus, he decided to throw a big party at his house so that his old friends - tax-collectors and others with awful reputations - could meet his new friends (Jesus and His disciples).

The morally upstanding citizens of first-century Israel wouldn't have been caught dead in Matthew's house. Morally upstanding Jews didn't hang with people with bad reputations.

But Jesus wasn't *only* eating with them. He had actually called Matthew to follow Him (Mark 2:14), which Matthew did, becoming one of Jesus' twelve apostles. Some of Matthew's friends were also following Jesus (that is, some of these tax-collectors and sinners were also disciples). (2:15)

This was simply not the way things were done in the first century and it's not the way things are done today.

Presidents don't invite people to join their cabinet unless they have a suitable resume. And an ancient king wouldn't grab someone to serve in his court who didn't have credentials and cash.

The religious elite at Matthew's house were watching this shocking display house of a rabbi (Jesus), hanging with "those" people. They objected and posed an accusing question to Jesus' disciples.

[16]... "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus responded with one of the great defining comments of His life and mission.

[17] And hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

That is different. Kings and rulers, the rich and the powerful, don't normally make themselves available to the least and the last and the lost. Jesus did, though. He made Himself accessible to people who did not normally have access to power.

And what He did at Matthew's house was simply the way He lived.

Other

He interacted with demoniacs, exorcising unclean spirits from these tormented souls. (1:21-28; 3:7-12; 5:1-20; 9:14-29)

He healed people of leprosy (i.e. - cleansed them), lepers being people so ostracized due to fear of contamination, that they were allowed no human contact with non-lepers. (1:40-45)

He risked the contempt of polite society by serving people no self-respecting Jew would serve (like when He healed the daughter of a Syrophenician woman, a non-Jew; Mark 7:24-29)

Jesus was an equal opportunity Servant. He served those on the lowest rungs of society's ladder.

And another thing. Kings and rulers, tycoons and CEOs often are guilty of exhausting others with their demands for service. This wasn't Jesus' way.

Consider the agenda of what is written in Mark, chapter one, as a day in the life of Jesus.

Serving to the Point of Exhaustion (1:16-34)

Walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He called two brothers, Simon and Andrew, to follow Him, and they did. (vv. 16-18)

A little further down the beach, He called two other brothers, James and John, to follow Him. (vv. 19-20) They also said, “Yes” and followed.

From the beach He moved to the synagogue in Capernaum and cast out a demon from a man who was there. (vv. 21-22; 23-28) From the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter and healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a high fever. (vv. 29-31)

There is a breathlessness to this telling of Jesus’ activity. Five times (vv. 18, 20, 21, 28, 29) Mark says, **“immediately...”**

Jesus is racing from thing to thing to thing.

By now it’s evening. Word has gotten out that Jesus is there in Capernaum and that He has the power to heal. So...

[1:32] When evening came, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. [33] And the whole city had gathered at the door. [34] And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.

No rest. Non-stop action. He put Himself and His energies at the disposal of others’ needs.¹ He served to the point of exhaustion, making Himself accessible for hours and hours.

This is not the way those with power usually do things. They exhaust others. Jesus, though, came to serve and exhausted Himself.

And we’ll see one more aspect of Jesus’ serving ways that is counter to the ways of the rich and the famous. This scene takes place in a personal home in Capernaum, the village that was His home base for ministry.

¹ He did the same thing with a vast multitude at Gennesaret and the surrounding towns and villages when He healed the sick as He was swarmed by crowds of desperate people. (Mark 6:53-56)

Allowing for Interruptions

While He was teaching... (2:1-12)

This home is over-crowded with people hanging on His every word as He was **“speaking the word to them.”** (Mark 2:2).

While this indoors meeting is going on, four friends showed up, carrying a friend who was lame.

Not finding a way into the house, because the place was packed, they hauled their friend up on to the roof, dug through the roof material, and lowered their lame friend on a cot right in front of Jesus.

Watch.

[Mark 2:5] And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now, we could go on looking at the miracle of forgiveness and the additional miracle of healing that Jesus performed - and the rest of the passage is GREAT!²

But what I want to emphasize is Jesus’ willingness to be interrupted.

He had been speaking **“the word.”** This is the living Word (Jesus) speaking God’s truth. That’s no insignificant activity! When speaking the word, you want to stay on task.

In fact, if you are like me, when you are on a task, you prefer to not be interrupted - whether it involves speaking the word, or something less transcendent.

I have been known to be perturbed, impatient, and less than gracious when interrupted. Contrast me here with Jesus.

² See vv. 6-12.

And have you heard the proverb (not from the Bible), *“Lack of planning on your part doesn’t constitute an emergency on my part.”*

Parents love that proverb.

A great way to build the discipline of preparation into a young life is to allow a son or daughter the slight inconvenience of the consequences of not packing a lunch or a jacket.

But with the hole in the roof overheard, Jesus didn’t say anything like that to this man now lying in front of Him.

He didn’t berate the man or his friends for showing up late, after the crowd was in place. *“Plan better next time, leave early enough next time, and you’ll find room.”*

No. He gave His undivided attention to the lame man. He let the friends’ poor planning to constitute an emergency on His part.

A similar thing happened on another occasion.

On the way to a healing (5:21-43)

He and His twelve disciples had just sailed across the Sea of Galilee from the Decapolis to Jewish territory.

He was met by a large crowd at the shore. Out of this crowd emerged Jairus, a synagogue official, who desperately begged Jesus to go to his house and heal his daughter who was at the point of death.

Jesus left with Jairus, with the crowd pressing around Him.

While they were walking to Jairus’ house, a woman in the crowd, who had suffered from a chronic ailment for twelve long years, got a great idea.

Knowing that Jesus had power to heal, she **[5:27]...came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak. [28] For she thought, “If I just touch His garments, I will get well.”**

Sure enough, **[29] Immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction.**

Now, that’s a cool miracle. The woman’s faith in Jesus was rewarded with a healed body.

Jesus next does something surprising. He stopped walking with Jairus when He realized that power had gone forth from Him to heal.

But remember. Jesus was on a race against time to get to Jairus’ house before his daughter died. You can see Jairus, tapping his foot, waiting for Jesus to get going.

Jesus engaged with this woman, and not quickly. He listened as she **[33] told Him the whole truth** (the whole story).

He listened long enough to give Jairus’ servants time to get to Him and announce that Jairus’ daughter has died.

Now, in the end, the story is redeemed. Jesus raised the little girl from the dead! But He, the Son of God, allowed Himself again to be interrupted by the pressing need of another.³

In Jesus’ culture as well as in our own, it is the servant’s schedule that is at the mercy of others’ needs. The servant shifts his or her focus during the day based on what others want or need. (You’ve seen Downton Abbey.)

But King Jesus allowed the interruption of His chosen activities to serve those in need.

Jesus could have said, *“After I get back from Jairus’ house, I’ll listen.”* No, He became Servant to the woman in need.

Over and over again, Jesus modeled servanthood for His disciples. He served the least, the last, and the lost, exhausted Himself in service to others, and allowed interruptions to meet pressings need.⁴

³ See Mark 5:35-43.

Then...

Mid-way through the tenth chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus and the twelve apostles plus a good-sized group of tag-alongs were moving south from Galilee toward Jerusalem.

And here's where Jesus' service orientation gets personal. He steps on toes. My toes. Your toes. He meddles.

We catch up to Jesus, now, on His final trip to Jerusalem.

Jesus - Calling Us to Serve (Mark 10:32-44)

Preview to the Cross (vv. 32-34)

Tension on the Road (v. 32a)

Normally, Jesus walked with the crowds and with the disciples as they moved from place to place. Not this time.

This time He walked alone, separate from the crowds. He was consumed with His coming sufferings. At a certain point, He stopped to pull His disciples aside.

[Mark 32b]...And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, [33] saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles; [34] They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him, and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again."⁵

⁴ While teaching a group of thousands of people in Galilee, they got hungry and He multiplied fish and loaves to feed them all. (6:33-44) He was teaching another group of thousands in the Decapolis. They got hungry and He fed them, too. (8:1-10) He went into a synagogue to worship and was confronted by a man with a withered hand. He changed focus and healed the man, on the spot, on the Sabbath. (3:1-6) Jesus consistently allowed Himself to be interrupted by the pressing needs of others.

⁵ See Isaiah 53; Psalm 22.

Shortly after this revelation, He began to walk ahead of the Twelve again.

Then, two of the apostles, the brothers James and John,⁶ separated themselves from the others and approached Jesus - alone. They've got something they want to talk to Him about.

We'll Take a Crown, Thanks... (vv. 35-40)

Round 1: Who's in charge? (vv. 35-36)

The Sons of Thunder, thunder (v. 35)

[35] James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You."

What a comment!

They were *insensitive* to Jesus' need, disregarding what He had just said about His coming sufferings. Then, in the request that they are about to make, they *ambitiously* looked to their own advancement OVER the interests of their fellow disciples. And they seem to have forgotten Who is the Lord as they make *demands* of Jesus.

Jesus responded calmly.

Jesus' cautious reply (v. 36)

[36] And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

He didn't rebuke them for their request. Nor did He promise to do for them whatever they asked. He just asked them to state their desires openly.

So, what do these two apostles request? Listen.

⁶ In another place, Jesus referred to these two brothers as "*the Sons of Thunder*" for their bombastic personalities.

Round 2: Ignorant asking (vv. 37-38)

[37] They said to Him, “Grant that we may sit, one on Your right, and one on Your left, in Your glory.”

It’s an outrageous request - selfish, to the max - and reveals that they either didn’t “get” or they disbelieved Jesus’ predictions of suffering.

They clearly believed they were going up to Jerusalem to be fitted for thrones - not for crosses - and they wanted to be first in line for cabinet positions in Jesus’ kingdom.

It was an ugly request, and Jesus’ response must have left the brothers disappointed. *“Yes, I will one day rule over a kingdom. But not now, as you think. And My Father will decide who sits where when that day comes.”*

And that ended - awkwardly - Jesus’ conversation with the brothers. But there is tension in the air, because the other ten apostles had overheard the whole exchange.

Following a Servant Messiah (vv. 41-45)

The Ten: “How dare they!” (v. 41)

[41] Hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John.

And why would the ten become indignant over the request of the two brothers?

I’m pretty sure it was because James and John beat them to the punch. They had ALL wanted the places of prominence and were upset that James and John had gotten to Jesus first.

This is a very unedifying scene. In fact, the indignation of the ten is no more praiseworthy than the request of the two.

So, here is Jesus, just a few short days away from His own death by crucifixion, and He has a mess on His hands.

Two of His disciples tried to cut to the front of the line to get first pickings in the kingdom. And the remaining ten were ticked off at the two because they wanted the best seats for themselves.

Jesus knew that there was no time to waste. He has to major on the majors and drive home key lessons in discipleship. In what follows, He spoke bluntly. Short, not so sweet, and right to the point.

He called them all together and huddled them up for a review of what it meant to follow a servant Messiah.

Greatness, Jesus Style (vv. 42-44)

“Leadership” in the world (v. 42)

[42] Calling them to Himself, Jesus said to them, ‘You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them.

Of course, there are “good bosses” and benevolent rulers in the world today. For instance, in Jim Collins book, Good to Great, personal humility is a mark of the best leaders, what he calls a “Level 5” leader. But clearly, very often, rulers rule with an iron fist.

The history of the world is the story of strong leaders giving commands, telling others what to do, bossing people around. It was true in the first century, and not much has changed over the last two thousand years.

Maybe you could tell stories of oppression from your own life. A boss that cracked the whip. Someone in a position with the government who made life miserable for you. A religious leader who barked orders at you.

Maybe you have worked in a setting that operated by the strong exploiting the weak, or by the rich lording it over the poor.

Jesus says that His kingdom won't work that way. His kingdom is radically arranged.

Jesus' "Leadership 101" (vv. 43-44)

[43] But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; [44] and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all."

Notice here that Jesus doesn't condemn the desire for greatness. He doesn't even say it is wrong to want to be first.

He simply points out that there is a certain order to be followed in attaining greatness, influence, and power in His kingdom: *Greatness in His kingdom is established through service.*

In Jesus, those have greatest influence who count it a privilege to serve. God counts us great in His Kingdom as we put others ahead of ourselves. Just like Jesus did.⁷

Service - a way of life for the disciple...

All those who are following Jesus are to be taking "next steps" with Him. A very important next step for you who are following Jesus to take is a step into service.

Your Lord served. You are to serve, too.

Serving others as a disciple of Jesus can take so many forms.

You already serve your family. How can you step up your game at home? Think of the ways in which you could meaningfully serve your friends.

Servanthood can be a mark of the way you interact with your brothers and sisters here at church.

If you are young and able, you could serve some by offering to mow lawns. If you're not able to mow lawns, you could serve by encouragement and affirmation. You could serve by prayer.

You could offer your service to any of the regular ministries of our church. Many, many of you do exactly that - and I would name you, but then you'd have to battle pride, so I won't. But I thank God for your service!

Here's how central I believe service is to life in Jesus:

Not all Christians who serve, grow. It's possible to serve with wrong motives. **But Christians who do not serve, do not grow.**

Not all Christians who serve a lot enjoy Jesus' abundant life. It is possible to serve with a bitter spirit and miss out on the blessings Jesus wants us to have. **But only those who give themselves to service have access to Jesus' abundant life.**

Would you look into the mirror right now and ask if the title, "servant" fits the way you live? Does your commitment to serving others in Jesus' Name align with your claim to be following Jesus?

If it does, fantastic! Keep taking next steps into servanthood.

If it doesn't, your next step needs to be an about face, into what the Bible calls repentance.

Take a moment - today - and remember the servant life of your Jesus. And however small or large, take a step into service in His Name.

The life of Jesus demonstrates the centrality of service. The teaching of Jesus shows the same thing. You and I are called to serve.

But, while we are to serve like Jesus, there is no way we can serve like Jesus.

⁷ Every writer of New Testament Scripture is careful to remind us of the danger of leaders - elders, pastors, bishops - lording it over the brethren. There is constant awareness in the New Testament that those who are in positions of authority must not think that they have the right to tell others what to do.

And here's where Jesus' servant orientation becomes more than meddlesome. Here's where it gets intensely personal. Here's where we see Jesus as the ultimate Servant.

Jesus - the Ultimate Servant (v. 45)

[45] For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,⁸ but to serve, and to give His life⁹ a ransom for many.

So far in this Gospel, Mark has quoted Jesus two times to tell us *why* He came to earth.

Both times, Jesus says that He came to reach those who were far from God and to bring them near.

The first time was at the party in Matthew's house. When some people objected to Jesus, a rabbi, eating with the likes of Matthew. Jesus responded, ***"I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."***

Here, He says that He came to earth to serve us all by giving His life ***"as a ransom."***

We can't miss the thought of substitution here. Jesus came to take your place. He took the punishment for sin that was due you and me.

We also dare not miss the impact of His reference to Himself as ***"the Son of Man."***

It is tempting to think of ***"the Son of Man"*** as a way for Jesus to call attention to His identity as one of us, to think of ***"Son of Man"*** in terms of humility. It's tempting, but it's NOT what anyone listening to Him would have thought.

In fact, the reference to ***"the Son of Man"*** takes us to a well-known passage in the Old Testament book of Daniel, where Daniel sees a vision of a transcendent Being coming from heaven to earth to set up a kingdom.

***[Daniel 7:13] I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the cloud of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented to Him.***

***[14] And to Him (i.e. - the Son of Man) was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.***

When Jesus returns to earth in the future, it will be set up a kingdom over which He will reign as ***"the Son of Man."*** When His disciples heard Him refer to Himself as ***"the Son of Man,"*** they would have drawn a line directly back to Daniel and understood Him claiming to be the One who will reign and who will be served by all.

It would have created extreme cognitive dissonance to hear Jesus say that He, ***"the Son of Man,"*** will NOT be served, but will serve.

But that was His purpose and life mission.

He came to give His life as a ransom *instead of* the many!¹⁰ His death won't be a meaningless tragedy. It's the means of salvation for all who will place their trust in Him.

⁸ The Son of Man provides the supreme model of status reversal in that He whose destiny it was ***"to be served"*** (Daniel 7:14) would become the servant of all.

⁹ The phrase ***"to give His life"*** brings to mind the words of Isaiah 53:12 - ***"He poured out Himself to death"*** and ***"bore the sin of many."***

¹⁰ Greek "anti" = instead of. Jesus died and suffered the righteous wrath of God so that we, putting our trust in God, would never suffer that wrath.

The reason He came to earth, as He says here, was to ransom your soul, to buy it back for God. He wants you to spend eternity with Him and He gave His own life to offer you the priceless - and free - gift of eternal life.

Conclusion:

Today, I have wanted to create a lens through which you and I can view Jesus. I am suggesting the lens of *servant*.

He modeled servanthood throughout His life. Menial service, interruptible, exhausting service. (Once, He even washed His disciples' dirty feet!)

He, the Son of Man, served. And He calls those of us who follow Him to follow suit - in menial, interruptible, exhausting service to all.

Then, He served in an over-the-top way that no one else ever could, giving His life as a ransom for many when He died on the cross for our sins.

Hallelujah. What a Savior.

[Mark 10:45] "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."