

John 13:15-17 – “Servanthood, Intended, Reasonable & Blessed”

(Pew Bible Page: 900)

Intro: Who doesn't want to be happy? Who doesn't want to be blessed? It is at least worth discussing the thought that the majority of people who come to Christ commit themselves to the Savior because they not only want to be blessed – they are desperate to be blessed! So, where does blessing or happiness come from? How can one attain it? Jesus revealed the secret to His disciples and we get to listen in on His counsel tonight.

Proposition: Jesus intends for all of His followers to become servants; if we obey His command to do this we will be blessed.

Our study tonight will look at three different aspects of Servanthood: (v.15) Servanthood is Intended; (v.16) Servanthood is Reasonable; (v.17) Servanthood is Blessed.

(v.15) Servanthood is Intended – When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He taught a lesson in servanthood, humbling Himself and serving the needs of His disciples. That lesson was meant as an example for each disciple to follow: **John 13:15 - 15** *For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* The example of Christ's servanthood was not given to merely inform His disciples, satisfying our thirst for knowledge. He intended for His disciples to imitate the lesson He enacted before their eyes. The things that Jesus shows show us are not merely for our enlightenment. They are meant to be acted upon. This goes far beyond the parable here of washing the disciples' feet. All that God has revealed to us has been given for the purpose of producing obedience in the lives of those who receive it. Jesus' example of humility and service in His life comprehended His *whole* life: He lived a life of sinless service, 24 hours each day; He taught constantly the necessity of humility and service exemplified in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2-12); He *“he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”*¹ In short, Jesus accepted servanthood for your sake and mine and in this way set an example for each one who follows Him.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Christ intends for His life of servanthood to be imitated in the lives of His disciples.

[ILLUSTRATION] Jesus' disciples were all about making themselves great. Matthew's gospel gives us the account of James and John's mother asking Jesus to assign her two sons thrones to sit on at His right hand and left when He came into His kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28). Luke tells us that the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them even as they sat at supper that night with Jesus (Luke 22:14-27). Up until the very day that Jesus went to the cross, His disciples were all about their “greatness.” Through His parable of foot washing, Jesus corrected their mistaken idea of what it means to be “great.” “True Christian greatness consists in doing good to others,”² and is done by humbly submitting oneself to serve the needs of others rather than one's own.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 2:8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² J. C. Ryle.

John 13:15-17 – “Servanthood, Intended, Reasonable & Blessed”

(Pew Bible Page: 900)

[APPLICATION] I recently read an interesting book entitled, “Autopsy of a Deceased Church.” The author conducted case studies of fourteen churches that had closed their doors. He was in search of common factors that may have contributed to these ministries failing. In every case he discovered a consistent pattern: each church had started its life focused on meeting the spiritual and physical needs of the community around them, but over time had lost that focus. At the end, they had turned their concerns inward, focusing solely on meeting the desires of the congregants for their own comfort. Outreach programs gradually faded away. Music and worship styles ossified. The building became sacrosanct and had to be kept the same as it had been in the church’s glory days. There were no discernable discipleship strategies. Attendance shrank so they stopped counting. Corporate prayer dwindled to nothing. These churches didn’t die in blazing flames of persecution glory; they just faded away. Every year in America, more churches die this way than are started in the hope of glorifying God. What is the trouble? When Christians lose their focus on humbling themselves and serving the needs of those around them, Christ’s hand of blessing is withdrawn from His church. Christ intends for His example of servanthood to be imitated by His disciples and the consequences for forgetting this are too sad to endure. It isn’t just churches that lose their vision. Churches are simply congregations of individuals. Dear ones, don’t let your fire go out! Too much is at stake. Imitate the humble servanthood of Jesus all the way home to glory.

(v.16) Servanthood is Reasonable – Jesus began this verse with the well-known phrase meant to focus His disciples attention like a laser beam on what He was about to say to them: **John 13:16 - 16** *Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.* “Truly, truly,” means, “Don’t miss this! Don’t miss this!” What is it that He doesn’t want us to miss? It is that He intends us to imitate His servant attitude and that this expectation on His part is perfectly reasonable. The life of humble servanthood He calls us to is reasonable because we are followers of one who made Himself a servant for us. The proof here is one of greater to lesser logic. If He, our Master who is greater than all has humbled Himself to serve, surely it follows that the lesser servants and messengers He sends out (us!) should reasonably do as their Master has done. If servanthood is appropriate for Him who is greater, it stands to reason that it is appropriate as well for those who are lesser. Why is this reasonable? It is reasonable because:

- Jesus is Lord – All authority in heaven and earth has been placed into His hands by the Father (cf. v.3) so that He can carry out the Father’s plan to gather His children into His presence eternally. All that Jesus does is devoted to this end.
- Jesus is a Servant – In service to this plan of the Father, Jesus humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant so that He could die for you and me. He is Lord of all yet made Himself of “*no reputation*” for the sake of our salvation.
- We are not greater than Jesus – By humbling Himself, the one who is the Master made Himself equal to those who are servants. He came down to our level for our sake. Now therefore, when we exalt ourselves, we place ourselves *above* our Master. Even the dim among us cannot find it reasonable that we should rise above Jesus, our Lord!

John 13:15-17 – “Servanthood, Intended, Reasonable & Blessed”

(Pew Bible Page: 900)

- What is proper for Jesus is proper for us – If it is right for Jesus to humble Himself, accepting servanthood for our sake, surely it is right for us to imitate His humility for His sake and for the sake of all those around us.³

[DOCTRINAL POINT] If it is intended and reasonable for Christ’s followers to accept servanthood, it is difficult to conclude that servanthood is optional for those who follow Christ.

[ILLUSTRATION] When I worked for Kroger it was the policy of the company that our female employees would wear uniforms provided to them by the company and that our male employees would wear collared shirts and neck ties. Every day of my work life at Kroger, I tied my tie and went to work. The company’s idea was to insure that our customers would recognize us as someone who could help them with answers to their questions. The way we dressed identified us as people who were employed by the Kroger Company and who were there to help our clients find everything they needed to be satisfied with their choice of Kroger as their grocery store.

[APPLICATION] In just this same way, when we wear Christ’s uniform of servanthood, we mark ourselves as His followers in our society; we identify ourselves as those who can help those around us find everything they need to satisfy life’s ultimate questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Why am I like this? Where am I going? Wearing the uniform of servanthood identifies us as those who have found answers to those questions; as those who care that others find the answers as well. To this day one of the most striking things about the reputation of Jesus Christ among the unsaved people of our world, is His reputation as a humble servant. Don’t believe it? Ask an unsaved friend or neighbor what he thinks Jesus was like personally and listen carefully. Some, of course, will not have a clue what to say in return, but many will express admiration for His approachable character and His willingness to serve those in need. When you and I imitate His servanthood, we identify ourselves as those who belong to Him, we mark ourselves as those who can help them find the answer to life’s most pressing questions.

(v.17) Servanthood is Blessed – Merely knowing that servanthood is intended and reasonable will not result in a blessed life, as Jesus went on to say to His disciples in **John 13:17 - 17** *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* The word “blessed” is translated in other version as “happy.” Whichever you prefer, the idea Jesus is conveying is that blessing or happiness is contingent upon obedience. To know that servanthood is required brings no blessing to us unless we act on that knowledge. Nor can one be blessed by doing the works of a servant without knowing Jesus’ commandment and obeying it. It is when knowledge and obedience come together that blessing is promised to the followers of Christ. Our happiness in serving Jesus depends upon this principle. James M. Boice has noted that our progress in godliness also follows our acceptance of servanthood as a lifestyle: “By taking this role [of a servant] you will inevitably develop the kind of character God can bless.” Implicit in Jesus’ statement is the thought that one might choose not to adopt the servanthood seen in Christ.

³ These four points taken from James M. Boice.

John 13:15-17 – “Servanthood, Intended, Reasonable & Blessed”

(Pew Bible Page: 900)

Perhaps someone would say, “I’m blessed enough just to be on my way to heaven! Thanks, awfully, but I’ve got all the blessing I need. Why should I humble myself and become a servant to people around me, some of whom I don’t even like?” J. C. Ryle gives us an answer: “It is the way of the devil to know truth without practicing it.” When the Spirit of God lives in our hearts, He always exerts His gentle persuasion on our conscience, urging us to put into practice the things we know are true. Simply put, it isn’t normal for anyone who knows Christ to refuse to practice Christ’s commands. Of course, we will sometimes struggle to follow through because we still experience the presence of sin. So, how can we overcome this presence and begin to live in victory? The Bible’s answer is clear: our minds must overrule our hearts. We must choose to obey what we know to be true whether we feel like it or not. Whether it is convenient or not. Whether it is costly or not. That is the way to maturity and blessing. Servanthood is not automatically gifted to us like sanctification, justification and redemption. Those things are simply given to us with our salvation. Servanthood has to be chosen and applied through active obedience to Christ’s intended and reasonable expectation that all His followers will become servants.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] It is the disciple who *knows* these things and *does* them that is promised blessing.

[ILLUSTRATION] Have you ever had the experience of walking up to the front door of a business and waiting for the door to open automatically, and it didn’t open? Perhaps you left a nose smudge on the glass. Have you ever had that experience and then realized that the reason the door didn’t open is because there was no automatic door opener and you were supposed to push the door open with your hand? If, like many, you’ve ever done this, you know what it is to feel a little silly; to look around furtively to see who might have seen you. Can you imagine how silly some Christians are going to feel when they appear before Christ’s throne and try to explain why they thought His command to adopt servanthood would be automatically theirs without their making any effort to put it into practice?

[APPLICATION] If we would receive the blessing promised, if we want to be happy in our faith, we must make sure that we not only know Christ’s command to become servants, but that we also practice His command to become servants. Why do there seem to be so many unhappy, dissatisfied Christians around us today? Perhaps the answer is that these folks, saved though they are, have never learned the secret of blessing: “*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*”

Conclusion: Jesus’ parable of foot washing led on to His application of the lesson in the verses we’ve looked at tonight. He intends for each one who has put faith in Him to imitate His servanthood, and this is not an unreasonable expectation in view of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. He promised blessing to those who take Him seriously in this matter. Are you one of them?