

**“Going Beyond Good Intentions Series”
“In Service”**

Today we celebrate the founding of our nation and in a real sense we celebrate the service of generations of hero's who have given us this great country, it's values and it's institutions...good and bad. Remember the words from Matthew 18, “Unless you change and become as little children, you cannot expect to be admitted to the kingdom of Heaven.” Next week pastor Jeff will share the necessity of change and the benefits of change. He will share that the characteristics of children that Jesus seemed so interested in his disciples adopting were attitudes of purity, humility, teach-ability and the decision to trust.

Children learn the stuff of life in two ways. Attitudes are either caught or taught. Knowledge is either caught or taught. Behavior is caught or taught. Well just a short time after the disciples argument about position in the kingdom we see that James and John, variously in scripture referred to as the Sons of Thunder and the Sons of Zebedee got their desire to be prominent honestly. Mamma taught, James and John caught, their mamma now comes to Jesus for “a favor.”

Matthew 20:20-28, Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" “We can,” they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will indeed

drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Notice in the story James and John are right there with Jesus and their Momma. You almost have to appreciate their tenacity. Jesus just put them in their place shortly before and they ran to momma. She was probably a pretty tough lady. She has no problem pulling Jesus aside, "Hey, JC could you do me a favor." "My boys couldn't get anywhere with you. How about a favor for me?" It's a good thing she wasn't a cheerleader mom, she might have put out a contract to break somebody's legs. Remember that case down in Texas a few years ago. Galilee appears to have been able to have filled a super market tabloid. Mamma's boys, James and John assure Jesus that they are physically and emotionally capable of "drinking from the cup" that Jesus will. A reference to his torture, humiliation and death. Jesus assures them that they will get that opportunity but they really have no idea what they are asking for. By the way James was beheaded personally by Herod Agrippa and John was boiled in oil, banished to the Isle of Patmos where he died an old man after receiving the Revelation. A feud threatens to break out, the other disciples are "indignant" with the two brothers. The Greek word translated for indignation is a compound word that denotes the concept that the other disciples were about to do

something to the Sons of Thunder. He then draws them all together and teaches them about greatness with some of the best known words of Jesus, “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”

We all want to be significant. In Genesis 3, a story is told about the first man and woman Falling from a position of total security in God and absolute significance. Their significance (importance) was absolute in the sense that God placed them in a position of authority over all creatures, and they enjoyed a daily “hand-in-hand” relationship with the creator. Since that was lost, humans have been trying to regain that sense of significance through pride, selfishness, ambition, self-love, and control over others. But Jesus’ solution to the problem of lost significance is completely different than what we would expect!

We want to be important. James and John, Disciples of Jesus, desired importance so much that they may have asked their mom to obtain it for them. There is an interesting paradox here for us to understand: the sin of Pride almost always leads to a loss of dignity. James and John’s mother’s solution to the problem of lost significance was a position of power for her sons. Jesus’ interpretation of the mother’s request was that she wanted James and John to “lord it over” others, just like the secular officials. Jesus presented a way to solve their and by extension, our problem of lost significance:

The first thing he did was to redirect ambition by serving others. Secondly to eliminate prideful desires to “be first” by becoming a “slave” (becoming last). And Third, by imitating the One True Leader, the most “significant” being ever born, Jesus, who did more to serve others than anyone ever had or ever would.

Jesus is teaching God’s answer to the human desire for significance. The answer is not

found in accomplishment or ambition or pride (which led to the loss of significance in the first place) but in God's approval. A servant seeks only the approval of the Master, and this is why the way to satisfy the human need for significance is not in "greatness" but in servanthood. Servanthood is an "acquired" taste for many. How many of you enjoy coffee? Of those that do, how many of you enjoyed coffee as a small child? The taste for coffee came with a maturing of your palate. For many Christians, a heart of servanthood towards others does not come naturally, but with a "maturing" of Christian character.

In May of 1846 an evangelist, now mostly forgotten, named "James Caughey" (pronounced "coffee") visited a chapel in Nottingham England and preached a sermon on the words recorded in St. Mark, "Therefore I say unto you, what things you desire, when you pray, believe that you will receive them, and you shall have them." Caughey preached that the key to this verse was to learn to desire God's desires, and that God's foremost desire was that we develop the character of a servant, to help the poor, and to spread the gospel that souls might be saved. A gangly young man was present at this service. He'd been saved for two years but had been drifting. But that day in May, God spoke to this gangly young man through evangelist James Caughey. The Holy Spirit gave the young man a passion for desiring servanthood. The young man acted on God's direction, and he devoted himself to starting an organization committed to the salvation of souls and service to the needy. A sermon on "desiring servanthood" inspired the young, gangly William Booth to fulfill his destiny and found the Salvation Army.

How do we desire servanthood? We already do! We think we desire positions of rulership, or a more self-centered life, but in reality we crave approval from God. And

God's approval is manifest as He develops the character of His Son in us: the character of a servant. So what is our part? It is fairly simple really but as most simple things, they are difficult to do, Remember what we said about habits a few weeks ago? Bad habits are easy to fall into and very difficult to live with and Good habits are very hard to develop but very easy to live with. Another way to say it is, these simple things are easier to say than to do.

The first is this, spend time with God. We become more like those we spend the most time with.

Secondly, be willing to say "YES" to God. When He asks us to serve, a willing heart will stoke the flame of desire for servanthood.

Third, spend time with those who cheerfully serve. Avoid "grumbling servants" at all costs...their kind of service will not teach you to desire servanthood.

Fourth, do not look at servanthood as a "means" to something greater...it already IS something greater! That's a priorities thing. Seeing servanthood as the something greater of our lives, as the thing that brings us significance, places people above things all the time and in all circumstances. Becoming a servant and moving beyond good intentions means reordering our priorities.

I heard a story several months ago that at first caused me some indignation but later helped me to see how easily we can lose sight of proper priorities. It was a 99 degree September day in San Antonio, when a ten month-old baby girl was accidentally locked inside a parked car by her aunt. Frantically the mother and aunt ran around the auto in near hysteria, while a neighbor attempted to unlock the car with a clothes hanger. Soon the infant began exhibiting symptoms of heat stroke. She was turning purple and had foam at

her mouth.

It had become a life-or-death situation when Fred Arriola, a wrecker driver, arrived on the scene. He grabbed a hammer and smashed the back window of the car to set her free. Was he heralded a hero? No, in fact he got a bill for the broken window. In spite of the saved baby, he was ordered by small claims court to pay the bill. When the story appeared in the San Antonio newspaper people were astonished at the reaction of the mother. Arriola said, "The lady was mad at me because I broke the window. I just thought, What's more important – the baby or the window?" Sometimes, in a world like ours, priorities get out of order, and a Fred Arriola reminds us what's important.

What's important is that we go beyond our good intentions. It is nearly always impossible to go beyond good intentions when we are worried about a position more than people. But Jesus' words ring clear and true as we strive to go beyond good intentions, "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." What will you give?