

## Servanthood, Redux

*“The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job?’” (Job 1:8, 2:3, 42:7-8).*

The Lord referred to Job repeatedly as His “servant.” Servant? What’s that all about? I doubt that Job was aware that he was the Lord’s “servant.” But that’s the term the Lord used for him. We’ve discussed servanthood previously, but it’s essential to our identity and it’s tragically missing from our modern, simplified version of Christianity. So we need to think about it again.

Half a dozen times in the Book of Job, the Lord applies the term “servant” to Job. We’re not to miss it! Job was a righteous person. That means he knew what God’s standards and requirements were for right living, and he lived by them. He was just in his dealings with others. He was a godly person in that he knew what kind of Person the Lord was, and he wanted to be like Him. In this sense, then, Job was God’s “servant.” He served God by portraying on earth, in time and space, His invisible, heavenly Creator. Job was like a statue, but a living one, bearing the likeness of the Lord. The rest of humanity may have belonged to Satan and served Satan, but not Job. Job instead served the Lord.

Adam was created to serve God. God gave him instruction how he was to do that. By voluntarily obeying that instruction, Adam would be God’s “servant.” But Adam willfully betrayed God, His Creator. By listening to the Serpent, Adam wound up becoming Satan’s servant instead. And so, with notable exceptions found in Scripture, all humanity since Adam serves Satan.

The angels are God’s servants. The good angels serve God willfully, the wicked angels necessarily. Satan is God’s servant, but he’s an unwilling one; Satan *must* serve God even though he has no love for God. God’s rule over all His created beings is absolute.

We humans were created to be servants, and so we must serve. Everyone serves someone! The great issue in this cosmos is, Whom do we serve? Whether we serve Satan or our selves is irrelevant; the result is the same; we’re NOT serving the Lord. So (if you’ll pardon my reductionist approach) I’ll say it this way: The great test of life, for each person throughout all time is, Will we serve God? Or not.

Let’s be clear: Serving God, as He has revealed we’re to do it (that is, not as we would choose to do it), is a *creational* responsibility, and He holds us accountable for our faithfulness in that role. God grants us the freedom to refuse to serve Him, but we refuse to serve Him at our peril. The Scriptures have been given to us, in large part, to reveal His will for us, that is, *how* we’re to serve Him. And we’re to do it voluntarily.

Scripture identifies the Patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, Isaiah and David as God’s servants. The Nation of Israel was called to serve God (Deuteronomy 6:13). He called Israel His “servants” (Leviticus 25:55, also Isaiah 41:8). The priests, prophets, and kings were all His servants. The whole nation was His servant, but sadly a failed servant. The first generation to leave Egypt at the Exodus was expected to serve God in one specific way: Fight the Canaanites. They refused, and suffered for it. Subsequent generations were expected to serve God by revealing His ineffable Person and righteousness to the Gentile nations. They refused, and suffered for it. A faithful servant had to come to fulfill that role. Jesus, the Jewish Messiah/King is that One. But for their repeated failures, Israel suffered (is suffering) the Lord’s severe discipline, Exile.

Let’s go deeper. We serve God in love. The very first law given after the Ten Commandments is, if a servant loves his master, he may indenture himself permanently to that person. The nexus between love and serving is tight. The nexus between worship and serving is also tight. In fact, the same word is used in Hebrew for both “to serve” and “to worship.” In Scripture, worship is serving God because of love for Him. In love, we fulfill His great purposes for His creation and for us. But there are other aspects of servanthood we mustn’t miss.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant . . . (Matthew 20:26). When Jesus said this, the disciples must have groaned. Here is something else about servanthood that’s absolutely essential: humility. The foot-washing in John’s Gospel exemplifies how serving others demands an attitude of humility. For without that necessary attitude, servanthood simply doesn’t exist. Why? Because, we must be humble, set our selves aside, and submit to the will of God in order to serve Him. God’s will wise and good, and He is trustworthy. We need to acknowledge all that to submit to Him as servants.

We’re a proud people in America today. Humility is alien to us. We exult in our liberties, our prosperity, our comforts and security. Only a deep work of the Holy Spirit in our innermost being as we obey the Word can change us into servants of the Creator God. We in evangelical churches today don’t even know what servanthood is, it’s so alien to us. If we refuse to submit to His teachings and commands, it’s because we proudly want to be our own gods, autonomous and willful. What results is we remain stunted, immature, fruitless and unsanctified, despite holding correct theological doctrine and perhaps even extensive knowledge of the Bible.

Job, the servant of the Lord, suffered at the hand of Satan. So did Jesus. The Son of God came to earth incarnate to serve. His specific role was not merely that of ruling or judging [that’s part of it, but for the future], but of suffering. In Isaiah, the prophesied Servant is a *suffering* Servant. In this cosmos, saturated with sin and hatred of God, the servant of God must suffer. So Jesus suffered rejection by His own people, hatred, and shame, torture and death. The servant must trust God to be vindicated in the future, as Jesus was by His resurrection. The servant of the Lord loves the Lord, worships Him, obeys Him, imitates Him, trusts Him, and suffers for it. In this evil era, serving God has to involve suffering loss in some way.

Jesus’ suffering was to make atonement for sin. If we’re following Jesus, we’re servants also. He’s the great, ideal, obedient and faithful Servant. We’re servants (small s), hopefully also obedient and faithful. Our union with Christ, our identity as His followers, makes us servants. Like it or not, it’s inescapable. Including even the sacrificial part, because serving God necessitates personal sacrifice of some kind. We’re either serving God as Christ did, sacrificially, or we’re not serving Him at all. No one can serve two masters. It’s either God, or it’s some other being such as Satan or some wicked god, or self. A true follower of Christ has “turned from idols to serving the true and living God while waiting for the Return of Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

When Jesus gave the commission to His followers to take the Gospel into all the world, He essentially made all His followers servants. And he gave us a specific task. He made explicit *how* we’re to serve. God’s great mission to reveal Himself to the nations of the world and invite them to Himself is now our purpose for existing. We will serve God in the future in some exalted way (Revelation 7:15; 22:3), but in the here-and-now we serve Him by doing evangelism. (See Romans 1:9a and 2 Corinthians 5:18ff.) Christians have been charged with fulfilling the role Israel had in the O.T. era, but failed to do. And we do acts of righteousness, and we deliberately seek to be transformed into a new creature, one like Jesus. We were redeemed *so that* we serve God (Hebrews 9:14; Revelation 1:6; Romans 7:4 and elsewhere). The “so that” is a purpose clause: The purpose God has in redeeming us is that we serve Him, as He’s commanded, as He’s revealed.

Let’s conclude. No greater privilege exists in this cosmos than to serve the living Creator God. It’s more than a calling and more than a responsibility. It’s the most wonderful blessing we can experience. Jesus promised, “My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26c). No greater blessing than this is even conceivable. Let’s therefore re-think our lives and what we’re living for, and commit ourselves to the one great task in life, serving Jesus. Full time. According to His will. If we don’t, after this life is over, we’ll not have another opportunity. There’s only this present existence to do it. So . . . Let’s be faithful.