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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

Jesus spoke to His disciples, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:41-45

Throughout His ministry Jesus taught and demonstrated spiritual truths to all who listened. But what is important to note, there is one spiritual truth He revealed directly to His disciples: servanthood. As such, Christians who are seeking a deeper walk with Jesus should fully understand the meaning of servanthood.

The words spoken by Jesus addressed three important aspects of discipleship: ruler, servant, and slave. With regards to connotations of words, ruler, servant, and slave create a negative perception and an uneasy feeling in most of us because of our earthly understanding of these terms. However, from a spiritual perspective, Jesus redefined what it means to rule over others; and revealed the eternal importance of being a willing servant to those in need, and a slave to the only One who is worthy.

This lesson will first discuss rulership, then servanthood, followed by slavery.

## **Rulership**

Most people have an “earthly-defined” understanding of the characteristics of a ruler. For example, it is commonly understood a ruler is one who:

- Has a position of power and exercises their authority over those who are within their dominion.
- Is at the “managerial top” of:
  - Countries, states, cities, and towns.
  - Multinational Corporations, companies, and proprietorships.
- Manages by:
  - Defining their vision of success.
  - Expects organizational compliance and achievement of the vision.
  - Executes consequences for failures to achieve the vision.

However, Jesus turned our earthly perception of rulership upside down when He defined spiritual and heavenly greatness as one who uses their position of power and authority as a means to serve others. Jesus declared rulers should serve instead of commanding; demonstrate humility instead of wielding authority; and consider themselves less important than those they rule over. What’s more, His declaration contradicts what has been employed by rulers throughout history and today.

Personally, I prefer the term “leadership” in lieu of “rulership” when it comes to describing the ministry of Jesus. Jesus did not rule over those whom He ministered. He exemplified leadership—as a shepherd leads and protects his flock of sheep by his words and his behavior.

Jesus was about to release the disciples into their ministries. Each would soon receive spiritual power and authority from the Holy Spirit—which was (and is) to be used as a means to serve others—as He had used His spiritual power and authority to serve them, and all of mankind. As such, He had to change their perception and prepare their hearts for what was before them. Rulers do not exist in the Kingdom of God because there is only One who rules. Those who seek recognition for greatness in Heaven will do so by serving. Those who desire to be first amongst those in Heaven will do so by being a slave: one who realizes they have been purchased by a price, and are now willingly owned by the One who paid the ransom for them to be released from the captive slavery of sin and death.

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

## Servanthood

From an earthly perspective, a servant is most commonly known as one who (based upon their own free will) performs compensated (and often menial) tasks that makes life more comfortable for the employer. As such, being a servant is considered a lowly position. Plus, when you think about it, being a servant is not a core desire of most humans. Because of our sinful nature we:

- Would rather be the recipient of servitude than to serve someone else.
- Prefer to be lifted high above others.
- Desire fame, power, respect, and admiration.
- Want to be first and not last.
- Are focused on self.
- Consider the lowly and undesirable as an unworthy investment of effort, because there is no perceived return.
- Do not want to deal with the costs of servanthood: time, effort, a loss of pride, and unfulfilled fleshly desires.

Our self-centered nature was often demonstrated by the disciples. Which is interesting because the disciples walked with Jesus, spoke with Him, listened to Him as He taught people spiritual truths, and watched Him perform miracles. And yet they did not understand the full magnitude of who was in their presence, nor what it meant to be a disciple of the Son of God. Two of the disciples (James and John) disputed amongst themselves as to which of them should be considered the greatest (Luke 9:46; 22:24; Mark 9:33-34). And if you're like me...you may find yourself scratching your head and thinking...really? But the answer is yes, because the disciples were just like you and me: misdirected, lost, in need of a Savior, and lacking the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

To overcome our sinful nature and reach deep into our hearts and souls, Jesus Christ turned our perceptions “upside down” and “inside out” when he taught spiritual truths. He did the same for the disciples when He taught them about servanthood.

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Mark 10:41-45

To reinforce the need to humbly serve others, Jesus demonstrated spiritual servitude by washing each disciple's feet.

Walking in sandals on dirty and dusty roads required washing of feet. Upon arrival at someone's home, a host would give his guest water so they could wash their own feet. Washing of the feet also occurred prior to meals, and is commanded in the Old Testament for specific priestly tasks and rituals. If someone does not wash their own feet, it was usually performed by someone that is socially “lower,” such as a servant or slave. As such, the washing of feet was considered a lowly act of servitude.

As you read the following scripture, place yourself in the mindset of the disciples as you witness the most powerful person to have ever existed on earth—and for eternity—humble Himself as a lowly servant as He washed the disciple's feet. Also consider the fleshly pride reflected in the response from Peter, and the response from Jesus. Peter had to humble himself in order to accept the washing of his feet by Jesus, and Peter had to humble himself so that he could be used by the Holy Spirit to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Human pride is like a kink in a water hose in that it makes it difficult for water to flow, and the Holy Spirit to share the living water of Jesus Christ.

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’ Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean.’ So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.’” John 13:3-17

There are different facets of learning we may derive from the washing of the disciple’s feet by Jesus.

1. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the one and only mirror image of God, validated and reinforced His words by demonstrating humility and servanthood.
2. His action conflicted with the disciple’s perception that He should not perform such a lowly task meant for servants and slaves—but Jesus declared we should do likewise.
3. We will be blessed when we mirror the servanthood of our Savior in what we say and do.

The life and words of Jesus Christ embodied light, truth, and life. Every time we fully “digest” what He said and did we learn more about Him, more about ourselves, and we are changed from within.

Imagine what this world would be like if every human being considered themselves as a servant to one another; without expectation of earthly compensation or return; where every person freely gives as received; and with the assurance of heavenly rewards for willing obedience.

## Slavery

The Apostle Paul used the term “bondservant” to describe a deeper spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ. The term bondservant is the translation of the Greek word *doulos*, which means a slave, or one who is owned by someone for a lifetime. From a spiritual perspective, being a bondservant:

- Is based upon a free will decision.
- Means one has chosen to:
  - Be subservient to Jesus Christ.
  - Willingly follow and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Occurs when one transitions from the bondage of sin and death, to the bondage of the Redeemer and eternal life.

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Mark 10:41-45

Jesus also declared those who want to be great (in the Kingdom of God) shall serve others while living on earth. In addition, those who want to be first among those who are great shall not only be a servant, but also a slave (or property of God) who lives in obedience for His righteousness and His glory.

“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 6:16-23

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:5-6



Given the lessons learned from the teachings of Jesus, pray for wisdom and spiritual guidance in how you may serve others. Are there needs you are aware of that you may be able to assist in fulfilling? Serving may be as simple as praying with someone; or giving an encouraging word, a hug, an expression of your appreciation and love, or even a meal. Serving may also involve sharing your spiritual gifts, skills and resources. When we look closely, we are surrounded by a multitude of physical and spiritual needs.

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Colossians 3:23-24

All for His Glory,  
Harold D. Thomas

Do you know of anyone who may benefit from this lesson? If yes, pass it on!