

When Servants become Friends

John 15:12-17

It is a great thing to be God's servant. The great men of the Bible have been called God's servants. Abraham and Moses and David, the bearers of God's covenant promises were all known as the servants of God. As such, they each had a calling from God that they responded to with obedience. Abraham was called to a land that he had never seen. Moses witnessed the burning bush and then was sent by God to deliver His people from Egypt. David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king. By accepting God's mission or purpose for their lives they became His servants. We think of servants as less than. A servant is less than the one he serves. Becoming God's servant puts us in the correct posture in respect to Him. We are less than God is and this should be fundamental to all of our thinking. But, if you are God's servant, you are more than those who are not. We are familiar with the status achieved by who you work for. The person who works for Albertsons might feel superior to the person who works for Ranch Market. The nurse at Methodist Hospital might envy the nurse who works at Children's Hospital. The status of the employer has a bearing on that of the employee. What an opportunity it is then to be a servant of the Lord!

When you think of servants, who are the good ones? What is it that would make you a good servant? One ideal servant was Eliezer, Abraham's servant. Abraham sent him on a mission to find a wife for his son Isaac. The search was to be specific. It required the unsupervised stewardship of much of Abraham's wealth. The trust that Abraham placed in this man could have been overwhelming. The future of the clan was in his hands. But he showed himself to be as much a servant of the Lord as Abraham was. He prayed for guidance and trusted God's response. He acted decisively and wisely and succeeded in bringing back to Isaac the ideal bride.

Joseph was a great servant. He was lifted by those he served to positions of trust and authority in many different circumstances. First, it happened in his home

with his dad who trusted Joseph more than his brothers. Next, when he was the slave of Potiphar who put him over all of his house. Then the prison guard put Joseph over all of the other prisoners. Finally, the Pharaoh put Joseph over all of his subjects so that he could be in charge of saving the land from the famine. In every case, Joseph put the interests of his master before his own. There was in Joseph a confidence that God was in control of his life and this allowed him to be optimistic and upbeat in the darkest places as well as in more favorable circumstances.

Paul saw a parallel between serving men and serving God. Since God is in control, we are to serve Him in any circumstance in which we might find ourselves. The household slaves of his times who were in the church (serving the Lord) were to serve their masters as they would the Lord. By making the choice to do so they freed themselves from the tyranny of man, and were promoted by association above their own masters who after all, had to answer to the same God they served. If they were treated unfairly, this became an opportunity to exercise greater faith and to join Christ in His suffering on behalf of others. No matter what, if they served the Lord, their service would be rewarded and honored when it counted the most.

The disciples had always related to Jesus as a servant would relate to his Lord. Jesus encouraged this perception. He was their Lord because of who He was, because of His authority and wisdom and mission. He called and they followed. In everyday life their responsibility was to discover what Jesus wanted from them and to do it. They were most pleased when they were given specific tasks that they could do on Jesus' behalf. As recently as the upper room, Jesus had related to the disciples as master to servant. For when He had finished washing their feet, He said, "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 Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that I 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."

But now, suddenly, Jesus is calling His disciples - friends. This was new. As far as we know, this was the first time in their three years together that Jesus had said this to them. "Greater love has no man than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you..."

How does a servant become the friend of the one whom they had previously related to as a servant?

It is first the prerogative of the master to invite his servant to be his friend. Such a transition is never offered lightly. Good servants are hard to find and there is risk involved in such an invitation. Friends have higher expectations of one another than servants and masters. There is a greater chance of disappointment and disillusionment.

So why offer friendship to a servant?

A friend has more value than a servant. There is greater trust. There is reciprocity. Friendships may not always be equal but they are more equal than that which is experienced between masters and servants. Vulnerability, transparency, mutuality cut both ways in a friendship. A master is in a sense alone while in the presence of his servants. But you are not alone in the presence of your friend.

Jesus offered friendship but it was up to the disciples to accept what Jesus intended for them. He stipulated that they must obey. By obedience they would choose His side. Friends do that. They choose to be on the same side. My son Peter and his wife Mary are very competitive. They love sports but they have learned to stay on the same side. They always play on the same team. It doesn't work for them to be on different sides.

But then Jesus defined the difference between being His servant and being His friend. He was willing to explain Himself to His friends who would understand but servants would be those who were not consulted and who would not understand

the why of what their masters chose to do. By this time, Jesus had confided in His disciples so that they knew all about what He intended to do. He had treated them as you would a friend and now it was up to them to respond.

God's complaint about Israel in Psalms 95 was that they did not know His ways. God gave them His commandments which was the opportunity to become His servants. Keep the commandments. Be My servants. This is what God wanted from His people. But when you keep His commandments you will begin to see how He responds to our obedience. You will also become aware of God's response to rebellion and disobedience. These observations will lead you to understand something of what God is like. This is how we learn His ways. Understanding God's ways is the intention of His friends. And, God was so disappointed when His people failed to become His friends. God wants you to be His friend. Friends act like friends or else they really aren't friends. Can you accept that God wants you to be His friend? Will you hear Him and learn from His word to you? Will you choose Him over the competition?