

## A Beautiful Service

1 Timothy 3:8-13

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Do you know Jesus said you could be *great* in his kingdom?

What does this greatness look like?

This past week a young NFL player's story caught my attention. This is a young man who is twenty-six years old, had a couple of million dollars in contract money. And this man made an announcement. This are his own words.

*"With much prayer and deliberation, I have elected to officially retire from the NFL as I endeavor to devote the remainder of my life to the further advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,"*

I don't know anything about this young man but why is this news not on the front page? This is real greatness. Trading the world's fame and fortune for the service of the King of Heaven.

There was a time when two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, came to him and asked him for high positions. To sit at his left and right. And Jesus turns his reply into a discipleship moment. This is what Jesus said, *"And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'*" Mark 10:42-45

Jesus' idea of greatness is humble service.

And this is not the only place Jesus talks about greatness in his kingdom. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples these words, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets;*

*I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” Matthew 5:17-19*

The Law cannot save you. But through Jesus’ perfect life and because of his righteousness given to us when we trust in death and resurrection, the law gets written on our hearts. They are not a burden. King David said the Law was his delight. He meditated on it day and night.

In another place Jesus turns it up even a notch higher than great. Jesus uses a superlative. One day the disciples ask Jesus, “Who is the *greatest* in the kingdom of heaven?” Not great but greatest. And here is Jesus’ answer “*And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them <sup>3</sup> and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”.* Matthew 18:2-4

So, according to Jesus, *humble obedient serving and teaching* is considered great in his kingdom.

When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he says “*whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*”.

Sadly, when we look around today, it appears like the unbelieving world is only occupied with what is false, what is dishonorable, impure, distasteful and repulsive. There was a time when some of the things you see today were not on your face. Today, sin is being publicly celebrated and praised as if it is a virtue.

And as believers you and I are not only charged to watch yourself so that you don’t sin but you are also called to serve others. Serving not for the sake of serving but for the sake of Christ and for others. Serving not primarily as some form of fulfillment but because Christ served you with his very life.

In verse 8 of this passage Paul tells Timothy that those who serve as deacons must be dignified. They must be respectable. The word deacon means servant or attendant. Someone who ministers to and cares for others. This word is generally used as servant and in some specific cases it refers to the office of deacon. This kind of serving is associated with practical matters in the church. In the early church, the apostles were primarily involved in the preaching, teaching and prayer for the work of shepherding. And

the seven deacons who were appointed - Stephen and six others were to care for the needs of widows and the distribution of food. And the apostles did not just pick anyone for the task of serving. Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.

So Paul writes about the two offices of the church – elders/overseers and deacons. Those who have to preach and teach and shepherd and those who serve.

Last week we covered many of the character qualifications regarding the office of an overseer, elder or pastor. Pretty high standards. Here, the office of deacon, as Paul puts it, has its own honor.

So, instead of repeating some of the character qualifications from last week, allow me to focus on three of them this morning.

The first one is an *active faith*.

*8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.*

What does Paul mean by the mystery of the faith?

He explains in another letter. In Ephesians 6:19, Paul asks for prayer that he may boldly proclaim the “mystery of the Gospel”. Same word. What he means is that the deacon or the one who serves must hold on to the articles of the faith. In the Old Testament days, the mystery was how God would forgive sins. With the arrival of the Messiah Jesus, this mystery has been now revealed. The package has been opened by Jesus himself and his mystery revealed to his apostles.

*“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ”.* Ephesians 1:7-9

So, the one who desires to serve must not serve in order to be forgiven but because he is forgiven, he is now free to serve as servant of Christ. And that service must be done with a clear conscience.

*Here is an illustration that might help faith and conscience. It seems Jonathan Edwards said that conscience is like a sundial and God’s Word is like the sun. Only the light of the sun will give the correct reading. So, those who say “trust your heart” must check it in light of the Gospel.*

Second character qualification:

We saw some of this requirement last week.

*10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.*

Evidence of blamelessness.

The outcome of their life must demonstrate a godly character. And only those who have lived out their life in the household of God must serve as deacons. Again, we saw this word blamelessness or above reproach quality. It is required for elders. It is required for deacons as well.

Some things to consider that might disqualify from this office are excessive debt, mismanagement of finances, compromised integrity are a few.

Some say verse 11 is a case for deaconesses. Some say that is a stretch. We might be able to pick up this verse at a later date. Verse 12 tells us what we saw last week. The deacon candidate must manage his household well.

And the last observation I have is the ground reason or the incentive for those who desire to serve.

*13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

Here is a two-fold incentive or reward if you desire to serve the church:

First, you have a good standing. You have honor and respect in the sight of the church for your service. Such people are to be recognized for their humble service.

I think it is in the St Vincent's hospital I saw a plaque or a frame. It said that the ladies who founded the hospital had their motivation from the Bible. The writing said, "The love of Christ impels us". That is why is they serve.

I began this message with the story of the football player who gave up his career for serving Jesus. The coach of that football team had said this man was of exemplary character while he was on the team.

Where ever you are, that is where you ought to display the Christ-likeness.

The second incentive: They have great confidence in Jesus. They are known for their love and faith in Jesus Christ.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **A Beautiful Service.** 1 Timothy 3:8-13

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What common character qualifications does Paul mention about overseers/elders *and* deacons?  
Why are these qualifications necessary in the service of the church and the community?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Who are great in God's kingdom according to Jesus? Mark 10:42-45, Matthew 18:1-4
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What does Jesus say about those live in humble obedient service to him and others? Verse 13. Isaiah 66:2, Psalm 25:9, 147:6, James 4:6