

The Dignity of Christian Service

Luke. 24: 32-35; Zeph. 3: 8, 9; Romans 16: 3, 4; Luke 17: 7-10.

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I want to say a word on the dignity of service. It is a blessed matter that there should be a desire in our hearts to serve God, and especially so in the day in which we live. It is well when the motive for service is lifted above all that which is casual on to the dignified plane to which it really belongs, for it is no light matter to serve the blessed God. It is a matter that has an influence not upon this world only but upon the world to come. Every true desire for service is appraised at its full value by the blessed God Himself. I believe it is a joy to the hearts of Divine Persons, Who have Themselves so blessedly served in love, when They see a real desire in our hearts to serve in responsive affection to the love that has so blessedly served each one of us; and let us say at once that any service not actuated by responsive affection to the love which has reached us from God Himself is of no value at all. Job tells us that wicked men say, "Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him?" That sentiment is not confined to Job 21, it is a sentiment extant in our day. How solemn is this attitude of the world towards God, refusing the allegiance that is due to Him creatorially; having no respect for the way in which He has come out in the compassionate love of His own blessed heart; and having no intention at all of serving Him.

What is more solemn is the language of God's own people in the book of Malachi, a people who had been served by God for centuries in the greatness of His love, and yet who say "It is vain to serve God." Solemn indeed that men in the world should refuse His service; but more solemn, intensely more solemn, that those who had experienced the blessedness of His love should say, "It is vain to serve God." It is in that dual realm we find ourselves tonight; a world which is estranged from the life of God, a world which worships the creature rather than the Creator; and a Christendom which, at the end of the dispensation, is largely marked by the features which marked God's earthly people in Malachi days.

If, because we appreciate the way in which divine love has served us, we have a true desire to serve in response, how blessed it is to know that our service "is not in vain in the Lord," (1 Cor. 15: 58); to know too that all such service is valued by the blessed God Who Himself has served so blessedly. "My Father worketh hitherto and I work," is the record of the unceasing service of love on the part of Divine Persons. There has been nothing more excellent, nothing more blessed, nothing more powerful, nothing more potentially yielding of results than the wonderful service of love on the part of Divine Persons. And this is the fulcrum in our affections which would lever our hearts in responsive and affectionate service to God.

When God took up the people of Israel, He set His love upon them, and desired that they should serve Him in response. The beginning of the book of Exodus shows them subjected to a servitude that was anything but what God would desire for them; they were Pharaoh's slaves. Seven times, so far as I can trace, God said "Let my son (or. let My people) go that they may serve Me." Though they were for the moment the servants of Pharaoh, God regarded them as "the sons of Israel," (Exod. 1: 1. New Trans.), and He accomplishes their deliverance in order that they might serve Him. The first time that God speaks of His people serving Him, He declares His Name as the "I AM, indicating that that service must be in keeping with the dignity of Who He is; the I AM. What a blessed thing to be accounted worthy to serve the Eternal I AM. The great and glorious Eternal One declaring Himself in the majesty

of His name and yet desiring that as known by that Name He should be served. The "I AM" has served us in love. In Gethsemane's garden we see the One Who in His person is the Eternal "I AM" saying in love to His own "If therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way." The "I AM" was there serving in the perfection of a love that would lead Him into death for His own, and that blessed One would cause our hearts, as appreciating His love, to spring up in reciprocal love and service to Himself.

The next time God mentions His people serving Him He says "Israel is my son, even my firstborn;" the dignity of the people is in mind. If we are to serve God as knowing something of the greatness of the name "I AM," we are also to serve Him in the consciousness of the dignity that divine love has set upon us, the firstborn ones; and beloved, the One Who is uniquely the "Firstborn" has served us in love.

The next time God speaks of His people's service He brings in the thought of their responsible pathway. He says "Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness." The service is not abstract; it stands related to our responsibility, to our pathway in the wilderness. And in the pathway of Christ in this world we see the glory of divine love in its precious service of unceasing love.

Beloved brethren, if we are to serve at all let us have our eyes upon the perfect Servant. In Mark, the gospel which portrays Christ as the Servant, and where we are told that He has "done all things well," He is introduced at once as the Son; He is serving in the dignity of a Son. It is Christ Whom we need to have before us as our pattern in service.

In the Prophet Isaiah I believe we have seven servants named, and the central one is in Isa. 42. "Behold My servant, Whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My Spirit upon Him." In Luke 4, we have a fulfilment of this word as we see the Lord Jesus serving in the perfection of love — as God's Anointed, in the place where He "had been brought up," where everybody knew Him. In Acts chapter two we see the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon His followers, and there is no reason at all why, in the power of God's Spirit, in the appreciation of God's love, there should not be from each of us this service in the place where we have been brought up; a testimony to the fact that we on the one hand appreciate the blessedness of God having served us in love, and that we desire to serve in return.

There are several words used for "service." There is the service of the bondman; there is also the service of worship. The service of the bondservant was preciously seen in Jesus. We often refer to the Hebrew servant in Exodus who went to the door and had his ear bored, and thus plainly said "I love." How preciously this speaks to us of Calvary. In Revelation 22 there is a wonderful verse. It says "His servants (the bondslaves) shall serve Him," (the worship service). Both kinds of service are brought together in that one verse, the bondmen serve, and the worship flows; and if Christ has served perfectly as a bondman, how blessedly also has He served in relation to worship. "In the midst of the assembly will I sing Thy praise."

And now I come to a very special side of the matter. You know, dear brethren, we cannot serve Him unless we know Him. We are in the midst of outward shipwreck. Paul standing in the shipwreck in his day says, "God, whose I am, and Whom I serve." There must be the consciousness of this link with God before He can be served by any one of us. What do we know of this secret history with God? "The God Whose I am." The conditions were not conducive to ease and comfort; it was a shipwreck — exactly the condition in which we are, a moral shipwreck. But towering above the shipwreck is the blessedness of God in all the glory of His precious love; He is to be known, and the link we have with Him as in Christ is to be known, and is to be the basis of our service. If I am to serve Him I must know

Him, and how can I get to know God? Surely the way to know God is to walk through this scene in companionship with Jesus. "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip?" As we find ourselves in close companionship with that blessed Man, He makes Himself known to us, and as He makes Himself known to us, He discloses to us the secrets of the eternal love of the heart of God.

Companionship with Jesus will knit heart of saint with heart of saint. "Did not our **heart** burn within us?" As they walked in holy converse with Jesus He opened up to them the revelation of God in His Word, the precious Scriptures of truth. At the commencement of their walk they were very ignorant, but they were talking about the most precious Person in the universe, and as He drew near and walked with them He unfolded to them further glories in relation to His person. Eventually they go back to Jerusalem and say "The **Lord is risen**". They are moving now under the influence of a risen Christ, and they find themselves in a realm where He is not only risen, but where He manifests Himself, and it was upon one of those appearances that He gave them that wonderful commission in relation to their service.

I want now to speak of Zephaniah for a moment. It is a day of power, I do not go into the dispensational or prophetic side of the truth; I want only to draw a moral application of it. There is a moment coming when in relation to God's earthly people His power will so obtain in the world that under the subjugating influence of that power His people will serve Him with one consent, or one shoulder as the margin reads. Can you tell me anything or anybody that could weld together every brother and sister in this room so that we all should serve with one consent? We have different measures, we have different appreciations and perhaps different desires. The only thing that can make this company or any other company serve with one shoulder is the power of God. And the power of God in this dispensation is in the Holy Spirit. It is as room is made for the power of the Holy Spirit that the saints are bound together in service in one consent, and in no other way.

Then as in communion with Christ and under the power of the blessed Spirit of God there are those who are prepared to lay down their lives in the service. The testimony at that time was pre-eminently in the hand of Paul; and Priscilla and Aquila staked their neck in his behalf. They had **one neck**. This man and wife are mentioned six times in the Scriptures; three times the man first, three times the woman; indicating mutuality in the things of God. Held together with one consent by the Spirit of God — having but one desire; how blessed thus to serve in response to divine love.

In Luke 17 a question is propounded — we see a servant ploughing, and at the end of the day he may think, "Well I have served pretty well today; some hard clods had to be moved; but I ploughed a straight furrow; I did not deviate from the path a bit; I went straight forward in my work; I kept at it, I am due to a rest." You know, we are all apt to talk like that, but the Master says, "Ah, there is one little bit of service that I am going to have, however much you might have served Me in the field today; there is one little bit of personal service I am looking for, I want you for a moment away from all the activities of the day and of all else; I want you to just set on for Me. I want you just to minister to **Me**, I want that little bit of personal service which only you can give to **Me**". May this touch all our hearts! When we retire at night, when the heat and burden of the day is over, we oftentimes feel so tired. But beloved, how blessed just to seek to be alone with Himself, to give to Him Who has served us so magnificently in love, that touch of personal response to His blessed heart that no-one else can give to Him. It is open to the youngest sister, the youngest brother in this room. We are not all called upon to stand on the platform, that is a small service compared with what we are speaking of now. Beloved brethren, I appeal to you tonight as I appeal to myself, see to it that that blessed One Who has served us so blessedly in love, see to it that we set on for Him, see to it that He does not miss that little touch

from your heart which His heart of love is yearning for.