



The Cross of Service

Text: John 13:16
Old Testament: Exodus 12:1-10
New Testament: John 13:1-17

We live in a nation built on self-improvement. Billions of dollars are spent annually by Americans on self-improvement. Exercise and diets compete with the fashion and cosmetics industries. Career gurus and motivational speakers teach us self-improvement.

In this time of the coronavirus, even more is being invested in self-improvement. Billions are being spent in science and technology to limit the effects of a virus beyond our control. This self-improvement effort has limited our access to each other while expanding government mandates to improve ourselves by limiting our exposure to each other.

Self-improvement is America's mantra. Our ancestors were lured by self-improvement promises offered in the land of the free, and the home of the brave. Now self-improvement's freedom and bravery is re-defined by social distancing, masks and gloves.

Some use pulpits to preach self-improvement is the pathway to heaven. The Gospel of Prosperity promises God rewards people with wealth when they're devoted to God. Wealth on earth and riches in heaven are goals of salvation for a self-improvement generation. Being a good person, being an obedient person, earns our ticket to the Kingdom of God, or so the self-improvement preachers preach.

But in these days of the coronavirus, the government has encroached upon salvation by self-improvement. Being a good person isn't defined by worship of God but by terms of health care and sanitation.



How easy it is to get swept along with the self-improvement gospel of American life.

It leads us right away from Christ. If self-improvement is the essence the Gospel, then why did Jesus call His disciples to servanthood?

A servant isn't invested in improving his or her own life. A servant doesn't live for herself or himself. A servant serves the life of others.

A servant gives life to others.

Tonight, Jesus calls us to abandon the self-improvement gospel. He calls us to radical selflessness. Empty your life of self. Fill it with concern for others. Only after you have emptied yourself of self, can you discover what God wants you to do for others.

Jesus began to teach us self-lessness with a bowl of water and a towel. He humbled himself like a house servant and cleaned the feet of his disciples. He literally showed His disciples how to follow Him. He took care of their most mundane needs – cleanliness – and instructed His disciples to clean one another. But He didn't limit His definition of cleanliness to bodily cleansing. His bowl of water and towel were just the first step towards servanthood. There was a much greater example He had in mind.

The Christian life is a radical departure from the self-oriented culture of free enterprise and wealth accumulation. The Christian life is a radical departure from self-oriented health preservation. The true Christian life comes in the shape of a Cross – the Cross of Service.

The Cross of Service is the radical demand Christ makes upon His followers.



The Cross of Service separates Christianity from being a hobby we pursue when we have free time, or a passive form of worship that is limited to a sanctuary. The Cross of Service is Christian faith that serves others.

Christian faith demands from Jesus' followers an investment in the life of others. It lives, breathes, and dies, for the life of others.

Pick a vocational calling where a Christian believes he or she is practicing Christ's call in public. Doctors, nurses, firemen, policemen, teachers, care-givers - each is Christianity faith working for others' lives.

Rather than seek wealth as a reward for selling a product, the Christian serves others at the expense of his or her life. Christian selflessness leads Christians to accept the most difficult tasks that others would never tackle because they can't see themselves being benefited. Selflessness is the first step to service. Without selflessness, the pursuit of service is corrupted by self-interest.

Elected leaders called public servants are another thing.

Candidates for public office declare they're running to serve their constituents. Yet many times those candidates claiming to work for others are serving their own interests?

Plato once said public office holders should never be paid more than what is necessary for survival. Today, we hear too many public office holders say they are entitled to raise their own salaries in order to attract candidates for public service.

The Cross of Service follows Jesus' instruction to go into the public without personal possessions. He instructed them not to solicit for their own survival but share the Gospel with those who will listen.

God will take care of the rest.



Instead of fanning the flames of who is the greatest disciple, Jesus said, “Whoever is greatest among you must become servant of all.”

Of the stories told about Jesus and His disciples, what He personally did for them tonight was so poignant, it holds a central place in the Gospel message. Jesus taught His disciples selflessness, and service as the central purpose of His mission when He washed their feet.

It was but a simple act. But it prepared them to understand what He did tomorrow.

Tomorrow, Jesus showed His disciples the greatest act of selflessness and service. He offered His life for His disciples, for the people of Judea, for the world. He served the needs of the world to have hope beyond death, and love beyond despair when He mounted the Cross.

When you embrace the Cross of Service, you no longer live for self but die for Christ. You no longer live to improve your own lot in life. You live to improve other’s lots with Christ.

The Cross of Service gets Christian school teachers up each day to make a difference for kids in their classroom. The Cross of Service gets Christian physicians and nurses working deep into the night to save the life of others. The Cross of Service motivates Christian public servants to endure the injustices of those who don’t trust their motives. The Cross of Service inspires Christian parents not to give up on their children when their children fall prey to the culture’s worship of self-improvement. The Cross of Service inspires Christian children to serve their parents’ needs.

The Cross of Service leads Christians in all walks of life to live for more than themselves – to live for others as they follow Christ.



Those who understand what Jesus' call to discipleship really means, do not hear a voice calling them to personally profit. They hear an invitation to help others find new hope, new love, new life by taking up the Cross of Service in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Servanthood is the path to salvation.

Amen.