



(Jesus says) 'Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.' (John 12:26 NIV)

Introduction

Throughout the T-PEGSS series we have discovered each expectation the Lord has for us is based on it being a response to his love. We turn up for him because he first turned up for us. We share the good news that Jesus offers us an eternal home because we have already accepted that invitation. We give because he has already given us more than we could ever repay.

Today's scripture on serving gives a new dimension to a relationship of following Jesus, and it is not what we might expect. 'Whoever serves me must follow me'.

1) A Relational Practice of Serve and Follow

Note: He does not say, whoever follows me must serve me, but expects serving to be the model for how He is followed. So, what's going on here?

When we stop and think about it, this sounds a little odd; why does he say it this way around? Doesn't it make more sense to say, 'follow me and serve me'?

Yet he doesn't. Jesus emphasises the serving aspect of following him. To follow in those days was not simply to trape around in the company of Jesus, but to do the things he asked, to be like their master.

I think of Elisha serving Elijah for example. The apprentice must serve and follow because the serving aspect of following is to learn and copy the ways of the master.

This reflects an ancient apprenticeship pattern that feels unfamiliar today, in a culture that often emphasises the self and sees learning as a path to gain personal improvement, respect, and financial comfort.

Said the other way around as 'follow me and serve me', and we can make the mistake that we follow the broad church of his teaching but are applying them for our own benefit. Sure, we help people along the way, but the mistake is to think that the relationship is set up as a way of improving oneself, gaining respect and comfort.

As an attention-grabbing example of that way of thinking, let me remind you of someone who thought like that, Judas Iscariot! A bit extreme? Maybe, but I use it to shock us out of the worldly mindset in which we immersed.

The ancient pattern, as practiced and taught by Jesus is to serve and follow.



Applying the Practice

Jesus sent out the 12, the 72 blessing them to go and put into practice the ways he was showing and teaching them.

It was not enough to hear and to watch what Jesus said and did. They had to take responsibility for practicing it for themselves. They had to experience the way of serving.

A little like a young bird will be encouraged and edged out of the nest by a parent so that it can learn to fly, so too Jesus pushed them out of the nest to try out his blessing for themselves.

Testimony

We heard Rebecca give an account earlier of how serving was a natural response to the Lord's work in her own life – even when she was still going through grief. Serving Jesus, by serving others gave her a new purpose and motivation for life.

Likewise, when I was speaking to Edward this week, he asked me to share with the church his reason and motivation for serving at Northwick Park Hospital. He works in the housekeeping department, a role that puts him in contact with staff and patients. It's also a role that currently means he cannot be with us on Sundays; so not all of you will have met him, but he still represents both the Lord directly and LPBC, as I can tell him when we have LPBC family at NPH and he will try to visit each person – our own unofficial chaplain!

Don't dismiss that as, well he is already there for he makes a sacrifice to do so. He gives up time in his breaks and/or he'll visit at the end of a shift, even a long shift, when most people would get home as fast as possible.

He told me, 'I'm there to show God's love to all people. They pay me each month, but I don't do it for that, I do it because I am God's servant in that place' If someone asks him the reason for his dedication, he'll share the reason for the hope he has. Even if they don't ask him, he'll apply himself always seeking to leave those he has contact with feeling more positive or hopeful.

The team at Bible Outline put it like this,

"As we serve Christ, we join Him in His mission, sharing in His presence and His work. Serving God aligns us with His plans, elevating our lives from mundane existence to divine purpose." (<https://bibleoutlined.com/john-12-26/>)

2) 'and where I am, my servant also will be': Assurance of Jesus' presence

Here Jesus gives assurance that He already is.



Remember with me for a moment that at the beginning of John's gospel he shared that 'in the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.' (John 1:1-2 NIV)

To serve as the way of following that Jesus first affirmed, is to realise that Jesus is already there. It is part of the seemingly paradoxical way of Jesus' Kingdom.

When we serve, we serve in his presence.

3) My Father will honour the one who serves me

Finally, the last phrase, 'my Father will honour the one who serves me.'

Reward should not be the sole motivation but it's so comforting to hear that our efforts serving Jesus are not wasted. Success is not measured by the response of others to notice Jesus. Some will, some won't. Some will be glad but still not turn to Jesus themselves and some will ignore him. There will be some who do respond to him; whether we know it or not - for it may be another's blessing to reap from what we have sown in service to Jesus.

Surprisingly perhaps, we need not worry about that, for Father God honours all who serve and follow Jesus. Jesus told his disciples that as they ask in His name it is not He who then asks the Father on their behalf; Jesus said 'No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me' (John 16:27a NIV)

Each of us should contemplate on how we serve; how we serve him in our church family and how we serve him in our daily lives.

Summary:

1. Serve & follow is the ancient, relational practice where serving is the way of following the master. It is not for the self whether self-improvement, respect or comfort, but the way to honour Jesus.
2. Jesus gives assurance of his presence wherever we are, 'where I am, my servant will also be'. It is both a comfort and motivation to know he goes ahead of us. Because Jesus is eternal there is no limit or end to our serving others; it is the way of life in his kingdom on earth.
3. The Father honours those who serve Jesus, regardless of what we might use as measures of success. To serve and follow Jesus is to be given the honour of relationship with Father God.

What can you decide to do in service of Jesus from this day on?