



Theme: B.L.E.S.S.- Loving Others to Change the World **“Blessed to Serve”**

Weekly Memory Verse:

28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Matthew 20:28

*For this series of sermons, we invite you to read the book, **B.L.E.S.S. – 5 Everyday Practices to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World** by Dave and Jon Ferguson. We encourage you to pick up a copy, or download one, and **read chapter 6 this week**. The readings below will complement this chapter, focusing on the moments when Jesus invited others to his table.*

Monday, October 24 – Read [Mark 7:24-37](#). Hard on the heels of teaching about what was truly unclean in God’s sight, as opposed to what outer ceremonial rules deemed unclean, Mark showed Jesus acting on that principle with a non-Israelite woman many would have thought unclean. (Matthew 15:21-28 gives us an expanded version of Jesus’ dialogue with the desperate mother.) Then Jesus healed a man’s hearing and speech, a miracle that evoked memories of [Isaiah 35:5-6](#), a passage that anticipated God’s love bringing renewal and deliverance.

☛ Look up Tyre on a map of ancient Israel. ([Click here](#) if you don’t have one handy.) Jesus went well outside Israel’s boundaries, into modern Lebanon, when he met this Canaanite woman and healed her daughter. [Ephesians 2:14-16](#) said one outcome of Jesus’ ministry was to break down barriers between people. When has Jesus brought healing to strained and broken relationships in your life? Are there people in your life you might be called to serve that are “outside” your normal routine?

☛ After seeing Jesus restore a man’s power of hearing and speech, Mark said, “people were overcome with wonder.” Scholar N. T. Wright in his commentary *Mark for Everyone* said that in urging people to follow Jesus, Mark, “envisages, not a boring life of conventional religion, but things happening that would make people astonished. If we’re still too deaf to hear what he’s saying, the problem is perhaps with us rather than with the message.” However long you’ve followed Jesus, what things help keep alive a vital sense of wonder and astonishment in you? How might serving bring you sense of awe and wonder?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, preserve (or deliver) me from any sense of boredom or tedium as I follow in your footsteps. Keep my heart alive to the awe your presence inspired when you walked this earth. Amen.*

Tuesday, October 25 – Read [Matthew 20:20-28](#). James and John thought they'd get their bid for power in before the other disciples. Jesus kept talking about his kingdom. "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "In the Kingdom of Heaven, there is no status seeking. The world's kingdoms are about having power over, but in my Kingdom, we serve."

☛ We have a good idea what power, privilege and importance look like. Down deep, most of us wish for some of the perks that go with power. But Jesus' view was succinct and direct: "that's not the way it will be with you." Jesus said he didn't come to be served, but to serve, and even give his life. In what specific ways does living like Jesus change your approach to life?

☛ Jesus told James and John, "You WILL drink from my cup." James was the first apostle martyred in Acts 12:2. On the other hand, Christian tradition said the apostle John, serving and writing, lived for many years in Ephesus and then was in prison on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean. In what ways did John, as well as James, "drink from Jesus' cup"? In what ways, if any, has your life so far called on you to do that?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I thank you that your love's transforming power can motivate me to live a servant life. Teach me how to treat others as you treat me. Amen.*

Wednesday, October 26 – Read [Matthew 23:5-12](#). Many leaders (even religious ones) seek exalted, lofty titles. We know that first century Pharisees liked to be addressed as Rabbi and to be treated with the greatest respect. They even claimed greater respect than that given to parents. They said that parents give us ordinary, physical life, but our religious teachers give us eternal life. By contrast, Jesus said his Kingdom was not about high-status titles, but about greatness in serving others.

☛ Scholar N. T. Wright noted that the Pharisees were not just religious, but also political and social leaders. He asked in his commentary *Matthew for Everyone*, "What are today's equivalents? Some might be the leaders, elected or unelected, in our wider societies, who ... rejoice in their 'celebrity' status, make grand pronouncements about public values while running lucrative but shady businesses on the side, use their position to gain influence for their families and friends, and allow their private interests secretly to determine the public policy of their country ... What matters is the huge and humbling principle of verses 11 and 12." How easy or hard do you find it to lay aside human ideas of greatness in favor of Jesus' definition of greatness as service?

☛ Does verse 9 mean it's wrong to send a Father's Day card, or otherwise honor your earthly father? No—Jesus often used a teaching style called "prophetic hyperbole," overstating to make a point. Here he probably referred to men who demanded the title of Elijah the great prophet (see [2 Kings 2:12](#)) and other "fathers" of the faith. When have you noticed in yourself a wish to make yourself feel more important by demanding your "rights" of role, status or title?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, keep purifying my motivations as I serve. May my meaning and sense of worth come more from you each day—until my service is about you, not me. Amen.*

Thursday, October 27 – Read [John 13:3-17](#). On the night before he was crucified, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. It was shocking as washing guests' feet was usually the lowest ranking slaves' work. His lesson for them (and us) was that by acting as a servant, he did not abdicate

leadership, but redefined our ideas of glory and power, and what it looks like to serve others. His life was guided by God's standards, not earthly ones.

- ✠ Jesus said, "I give up my life so that I can take it up again," in [John 10:17](#). He used the same Greek words to describe Jesus "taking off" and "putting on" his robes before and after he washed the disciples' feet. In what ways was Jesus' action not just practical, but an acted-out parable of the way he would give himself for us on the cross? Have you ever had an experience in which acting humbly toward someone else felt almost like dying?
- ✠ Can you imagine the yearning in Jesus' heart as he washed Judas' feet, the one who would betray him? Washing feet was a practical act in a dusty land where people wore sandals. What are some practical ways you can serve another person that will tangibly make their life better? Who is God leading you to bless with a concrete act of service?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, what an example of humility you gave us! Soften my proud heart. Make me willing to take up the towel as you did, to set my power aside for the good of others. Amen.*

Friday, October 28 – Read [Galatians 5:13-16](#). The Apostle Paul started new churches in Galatia (modern day Turkey), but they had fallen into disagreement and struggle. False teachers came to the churches and began convincing them they still had to follow certain rules and laws for God to accept them. Paul's letter resisted the false teachers. He urged his readers to claim their freedom in Christ, but to use that freedom to, "love your neighbor as yourself."

- ✠ In verse 13, Paul bluntly stated a truth that can be painful to admit. We all have selfish impulses, especially when given the ability to choose freely. He pointed his readers to the one who can give us the ability to live out the Golden Rule: The Holy Spirit. Paul said in verse 16, "Be guided by the Spirit and you won't carry out your selfish desires." In what areas of your life do you want to invite the Spirit to empower you to deny your selfish desires and love your neighbor as yourself more fully?
- ✠ The Message version of verse 13 reads, "God has called you to a free life, but use your freedom to serve one another in love. That's how freedom grows." In what ways have you found it freeing to let the Spirit guide you into loving and serving others, rather than having to follow all your impulses?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you came to set me free. I like being free from other people's demands, and from bad things. Help me also value the times when you set me free from my own self-centeredness. Amen.*

Don't forget our "Glow with God" and "Trunk or Treat" events are Saturday night! [Learn more here.](#)

Saturday, October 29 – Read [Matthew 25:31-46](#). After talking about the Temple's destruction and the end of the world in sometimes puzzling terms, Jesus gave a word picture of the final judgment. His story about the judgment clearly conveyed his Kingdom's priorities. In God's Kingdom, people care for the hungry and thirsty, the poorly-clothed and strangers, the prisoners and the sick—the people whom Jesus called "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine."

- ✠ There's a Christian song that begins, "I met Jesus today, and I really must tell you, he didn't look at all like the pictures ... He was a hungry child, a sick friend of mine, a stranger who needed a coat." In Jesus' story, both those accepted and the ones who were turned away were surprised. They expected to meet Jesus in "religious" places, not in the streets among the needy and poor. But Jesus' story said we should notice all people in need of help and treat them as if it were Jesus himself in need. In what ways can you sense God

reshaping your attitudes toward “the least of these” in our community and the wider world? How might this story change what it means to serve others?

Prayer: *Jesus, show me the “least of these” in my wealthy neighbor who struggles emotionally or spiritually, my poor friend who suffers financially, my sick friend who needs your comfort while dying—and in myself, who needs more of you in my life. Amen.*