

The Importance of Service to Others

Presbyterian pastor and author, James Montgomery Boice was once asked by a young man how one might remain a strong Christian during his years in college. This young man was rightly concerned that the pressures of study along with the dominant secular viewpoint in many colleges might undermine his faith. The advice that Dr. Boice gave to this young man is still relevant today. He said that there are three elements that this young man would need to include in his schedule: First, a period of daily personal Bible study and prayer. Second, regular fellowship and worship with other Christians, both with his peers (e.g. in a dorm room Bible study or some student meeting of Christians) and in a weekly Lord's Day worship service. The third thing that this young student was advised to do so that his faith would remain strong was some form of regular service to others.

The first two of these important suggestions from Dr. Boice may not surprise us but the last one we may not have expected. Dr. Boice shared that, "Only in [the service of others] do we get our minds off of ourselves and onto others and their problems, as Christ indicated that we should do if we are to be his disciples." What Dr. Boice shared with this young man is not merely good advice, it is biblical truth. Christians are called to serve others.

In chapter 20 of Matthew's gospel, we get an interesting look at the disciples misunderstanding of what it meant to be a part of the kingdom that Jesus was proclaiming. As the narrative proceeds, the mother of James and John comes to ask Jesus for a special place for her sons in his kingdom. Although it is good that they believe Jesus' teaching about the kingdom, it soon becomes very clear that they are confused as to the type of kingdom that Jesus has been teaching about. Jesus calls his disciples together and takes an opportunity for some important instruction. "...whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave." Jesus is saying in effect that those who are truly his kingdom disciples will be those who live lives of sacrificial service to others.

At this point I want to call your attention to a very important biblical truth; we serve others because we are in the kingdom, not so that we can gain entrance into the kingdom. We are not right with God by our obedient service but rather by faith in the finished work of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-10). Jesus summarizes his teaching on service in this passage with the following powerful statement. "...even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." It should be noted that in one sense, Jesus' sacrifice is unique and

cannot be repeated. Only Jesus who is perfect in every way could ever pay the price for sin by his atoning death. But in another sense, he gives us a very practical example to follow. Jesus always did the will of his Father in heaven (John 17:4) and that should be our desire as well. An important part of the Father's will is to seek, by grace, to live a life of selfless love and sacrificial service to others.

Sacrificial service to others not only helps us to take our mind off ourselves and to sympathize with those who are in need, it points to the beauty of Jesus Christ who gave himself sacrificially and completely for others.

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