

Serving to Soaring

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Service

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10: 42- 45)

We must be prepared to serve; even to clean the toilets. We may have to serve for a long time in the most menial tasks; unseen and not seeking praise. Serving with a heart of love and enthusiasm are key: we must never serve in order to gain position.

Wildwood Church meets in a school, so every Sunday involves a lot of setup work. I have been on the set-up team at various times since 1988. Quite often this has meant making my own way to church, leaving early on a Sunday morning and having to walk or cycle there before I had a car. It became more of a sacrifice when I was married, when I would cycle and find a lift for my wife. We are given clear instructions on how to serve in Matt 6: 3-4:

“when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”

If we take the lowest place at the table (Luke 14:10) our host will eventually say; “Friend, we have a better place for you!”

Jesus, the King of Kings, gave us the ultimate example of royal behaviour to follow:

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” (John 13: 3-5)

Finally, 1 peter 4 10-11 tells us:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

However we are called to serve, we carry on in that capacity until God makes a change.

Stagnant or Flowing?



Be a joyful giver

"This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9 v 6-15)

***One person gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.***

A generous person will prosper;

whoever refreshes others will be refreshed (Proverbs 11:24-25)

These passages are generally used with reference to finances, but I believe they apply to all areas of giving, including acts of service.

We can see from both of them that what God has given to us, whether natural or spiritual gifts, never was, and never will be, given for us to keep for ourselves, but to be continually given out.

Let's look at this in nature. If you have a pond with no inlet or outlet the pond water becomes stale and stagnant-smelling, full of sludge and algae and no longer attractive to anyone. The smell is so repugnant that it repels people even before they get to see it.

It is the same with giftings: if we use all our gifting to build ourselves up and bolster our ego, people will soon be saying: "look at him, he is so selfish and obsessed with himself."

But if you have a lake with a river that flows in and out of it, then the water is fresh; plants and trees around it are green, the air smells fresh close up, the water has beautiful reflections of the sky and the surroundings, it is bursting with life both in and out of the water, it attracts people to it and gives them peace.

Whether it is resources or gifting, let us remember Luke 6:38:

"Give, and it shall be given unto you: pressed down and running over shall men pour into your lap."

If we do, our water will always be fresh.

The Crumbs under the Table



Even the dogs have the crumbs that fall from the master's table...

“Then Jesus left Galilee and went North to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Gentile woman who lived there came to him, pleading, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! For my daughter is possessed by a demon that torments her severely.’ But Jesus gave her no reply, not even a word. Then his disciples urged him to send her away. ‘Tell her to go away,’ they said. ‘She is bothering us with all her begging.’ Then Jesus said to the woman, ‘I was sent only to help God’s lost sheep—the people of Israel.’ But she came and worshipped him, pleading again, ‘Lord, help me!’ Jesus responded, ‘It isn’t right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs.’ She replied, ‘That’s true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters’ table.’ ‘Dear woman,’ Jesus said to her, ‘your faith is great. Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was instantly healed.” (Matthew 15: 21-27)

Like all the stories in the gospels, there are many lessons we can learn from this account. I just want to look at a couple that apply specifically to prophesy.

Firstly, it’s always good to be asking God for what can one take from prophecies that are given to other people. I apply this in my walk of wanting to hear from God, not turning off or thinking either: “that’s nice for them,” or “why doesn’t God ever have a word for me,” but asking the Lord if there are any crumbs for me under the table.

This can also be applied to messages brought at meetings: if we ask the Lord what He wants to say to us, there may well be something which might not be the speaker's main point, or even something he is speaking about, but which is prompted by part of the message.

The second is the woman's persistence. I believe we have to be persistent in our desire to hear from God. He wants to know that we are serious. We look at persistence again in the next article in this series.

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. (Matthew 11v12)

Again, this scripture is open to a number of interpretations, but one is that the "forceful" the push into the kingdom of Heaven to take hold of it in their lives. I believe is not only about those newly brought to the kingdom of God, but also those fervently and earnestly seeking to take hold of spiritual gifts:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2 v10)

We are saved by grace not by works, so this is not in any way suggesting that salvation is something that we earn; but I believe it is to do with pressing into our gifts (both spiritual and natural). We must remember that we have an enemy who is trying to halt our growth and maturity in the Lord, so we must soberly keep in mind our weaknesses and keep our armour on.

God has great works planned for us to do, **with** Him and not **for** Him, where we will need to use our giftings to complete them and bring glory to God. If we work with Him, He will continually give us the strength and abilities that we need; but if we try and work for Him we will generally be doing it in our own strength and determination, often trying to earn favour with the Lord, forgetting that we were saved by grace and that these works were already planned for us to accomplish with Him before the beginning of time.

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me." (Philippians 3: 12-13)

Again here we see the picture of something that not given to us when we become a Christian but for which we must contend spiritually as we take the Kingdom by force. He has already planned what gifts and assignments He has for us that will bring Him glory, but as the apostle Paul puts it we are to press in to them. So in all this there is a battle, and battles are not won by being passive or hesitant, or by just waiting around for the victory to happen. We need to press in or take by force everything that God has for us and that has been prophesied over us, no

matter what the cost. As we battle to grow further into our Kingdom calling God will start to give us a hunger for more.

To conclude this section on a practical point, I find that speaking in tongues is a key to hearing more from God.

“For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.” (1 Corinthians 14: 2)

I believe these mysteries that we speak in our heavenly language actually impart the mysteries of Heaven to our spirits. Any crumb from Heaven is a whole loaf of bread here on Earth.

Identity Crisis



Bartimaeus (Mark 10 v 46-52)

Bartimaeus knew about Jesus and knew what he would do for him, yet he also was aware that he did not deserve to be healed as he called out “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Herein lies another key, which is knowing our frail spiritual state. As Bartimaeus showed, we really don’t deserve anything: all that we receive is by the Lord’s mercy. But because of what Jesus has done on the cross for us we can boldly enter the throne room of our Father and ask for what we want. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:16)

Bartimaeus recognised Jesus and not stop calling out to Him. Even when he was told to be silent he was persistent and called out even more, and when Jesus called him he threw off anything that was hindering him, jumped up and went to Him. Then Jesus asked him what he wanted. Bartimaeus simply said: “I want to see,” not “if it’s your will,” or “It would be really nice if I could see...”

So we can see how much he wanted to see and be healed: he threw his cover off and jumped up; he didn’t just get up on his feet and tentatively wander over in the hope that he might be noticed. Bartimaeus had one thing on his mind, and

his actions expressed it. Although this story is used for healing, I believe we can do the same with whatever we want from the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews says:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. (Hebrews 12 v1))

These weights could be things that we have held onto from the past that we have allowed to become part of our identity. This could include illness, disability, even sin: essentially anything that we hold onto that means that we are not fully accepting our identity in Christ. Are we willing to throw off everything, even things that have become our identity, like Bartimaeus's begging bowl? We don't need them: we are new creations, as 2 Corinthians 5: 17 makes absolutely clear.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!

Our identity is in Christ and not things of the past; whether it's our wealth, our position in our job, what we have given away, our house, our reputation, even our healing. It has all gone, and the new has come. We are hidden in Christ.

For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3: 3)

So our identity should be focused who Jesus says we are; and since this is hidden in Him, nothing can take it from us. It will always be true. How we process this truth is our choice: we can either throw everything off to fully take hold of it in faith; or we can put some of our eggs in different baskets, maybe because we don't want to let go of something else that has become our identity due to fear, or maybe we are just hedging our bets because our experience hasn't matched up to the truth. However, the truth remains, whether we choose to believe it and act on it or not, much like the sun is always shining even if it's cloudy. If our experience is not matching the truth we need to take hold of the Word fully, letting go of everything that hinders us.

Now go back to the sub-title of this article. I left a word out. What was it?

So anything that stops us remembering and living out these truths could be classed as part of the identity of our old self; the one that has gone. Are we willing to throw them all off and jump up, making ourselves look foolish, shouting louder than the noise of the distractions around us? Are we prepared to stumble blindly towards Jesus, through the mocking and the catcalls, despite all the adversity, until we hear Him say to us: "What can I do for you?" Will we speak the truth that is in our hearts and say directly and plainly, "I WANT TO SEE!"

Our Father in Heaven doesn't mince His words. Jesus tells us to let our "yes be yes, and our no be no." I believe we need to follow His ways in this, and tell Him what is on our hearts without wrapping it up in formulae.

John Wesley and Billy Graham.

Two more recent examples of calling out earnestly and in desperation are John Wesley and Billy Graham. In John Wesley's house there are two knee sized marks in the carpet next to his bed where he cried out to God for revival. When Billy Graham was a student at Wheaton College he was one of a group of students that visited the building. When the lecturer returned to the coach he counted the students and found one missing, so he went back into the building to find Billy Graham kneeling in the same knee marks as Wesley, his face flat the bed, calling out: "Do it again lord!" Do we have this passion? How much do we want to know Jesus and do what He asks of us? Will we long for and cry out for healing and revival? Do we cry out for God to touch us again? And the big question: what are we willing to sacrifice to gain these things?

If we want to learn from Bartimaeus and Billy Graham we must be willing to shut ourselves away and lock into the Lord, to become more like Jesus and to let his holy fire refine us. In so doing we in turn will be set on fire for him. If it only takes one man to stand in the gap for the Lord to do what He did through John Wesley and Billy Graham, just imagine what one church can do. Jesus said: "When two or three are gathered in my name I will be there in the midst." If only we would see the truth of this as often as we say the words.

Bartimaeus's old identity.

Bartimaeus's old identity was "blind." This was the word I missed out earlier. He knew who Jesus was, and not caring what he sounded or looked like he approached Him boldly and in complete faith that Jesus would meet his need. His identity was Bartimaeus, not Blind Bartimaeus. And yes, Jesus healing him was an awesome miracle, but there is more written about Bartimaeus than the miracle here. I think that the fact that he was blind is secondary to the fact that he was persistent and didn't hold onto his disability. I think Mark is making the point that it was persistence and desperation for Him which caused our Lord to stop. He wants to see how much we really want what He has for us. He wants us to be utterly reliant on him and desperate for Him. In His presence all of us are beggars.

Soaring Like Eagles



“But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40 v 31

We need to understand the eagle to get a more complete picture of what the Lord is saying through this passage. The eagle is the fastest animal created, soaring at speeds of 140 miles per hour and in excess of 200 miles per hour when it spots prey. It also flies at a height of between 23000 feet to 36000 feet, sometimes for days without a single flap of its wings, and even can fly through a hurricane. Eagles actually love the challenge of a storm . When other birds will try to flee, the eagle will fly into it, using the wind of the storm to rise higher in a matter of seconds, just soaring unaltered from its path but at a greater height. The eagle’s wings are so aerodynamic that air flows over them causing very little turbulence. I believe that as we wait upon the lord He prunes and trims our wings to be more aerodynamic, so that we may soar on the thermals and fly into the storms when they come.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a

branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15 v1-8)

Eagles are very efficient birds, which is how God wants us to be: soaring on his thermals in the Spirit. So just like He prunes us to make us fruitful, the Lord will also prune and trim our wings to be ever more aerodynamic, soaring and remaining steady through the storms of life. Another amazing fact about the eagle that if it loses a feather either on one side – on land or soaring – it instantly loses the same feather on the other side to keep it in balance. I believe when the Holy Spirit prunes us He does the same thing, keeping us balanced so we can continue soaring with Him.

Eagles are famous for their vision: we talk about having “eagle eyes.” The eagle flies well above the ground so it can see what is going on. What we are called to do as a church and as members of His body is to wait on the Lord so we can soar above the troubles of life, even flying into the storms, appearing almost motionless as we keep an eye out for anyone caught in the enemy's snare on the ground. When we see someone in trouble we can dive down to rescue them as quickly as possible, carrying them with us up to the safety of the skies to be restored by the Lord.

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