

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/1/04 Brad Brandt

Value #4—"Service: Using the Towel and Basin" **

Main Idea: The Lord wants us to value service. We see Him taking three actions in the Bible that make that perfectly clear.

I. The Lord modeled service (Matt 20:28).

A. He served by coming.

B. He served by giving His life.

II. The Lord mandated service (John 13:12-17).

A. We're saved because He served.

B. We're saved in order to serve.

III. The Lord makes service possible.

A. He gave us examples.

1. Paul served by preaching (Acts 20:17-21).

2. Timothy served by assisting (Phil 2:19-22).

3. Epaphras served by praying (Col 4:12).

4. Dorcas served by helping the poor (Acts 9:36).

5. The Macedonian churches served by giving (2 Cor 8:1-5).

B. He gave us gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11).

1. Serve according to your gift.

2. Serve for the good of others.

3. Serve in dependence on God.

4. Serve for the praise of God.

C. He gave us a method (Eph 4:11-12).

1. Pastors equip (Eph 4:11-12a; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

2. The saints do works of service (Eph 4:12b).

3. Deacons set the pace (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-10).

D. He gave us a place to serve (Rom 12:4-8).

1. My church needs me.

2. I need my church.

Make It Personal: Two questions to make service a reality...

1. What has the Lord given me?

2. Will I use it for Him this week?

The mood was solemn. Jesus and His twelve men were together in the upper room, the Passover meal being served. Then the Master did the unthinkable.

He got up, removed His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He then took a basin, filled it with water, and approached the disciples. He *kneeled* before the first man, picked up his crusty feet, and applied the water. The dirt turned to mud. He applied more water until the mud was gone and the foot clean, after which He took the towel and dried the toes, the arch, and the heel. Then He took the other foot in His hands and repeated the process.

The room was dead silent as the Lord of the universe proceeded to stoop before the second man. Once again He lifted the man's feet and washed them. He did the same with the next disciple, and the next, and the next. Twenty-four grimy feet. Twelve stunned men.

When He finished He redressed, returned to His place at the head of the table, and broke the silence with a question, "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He proceeded to answer His own question (John

13:13-17):

"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

This is Christianity 101. We are called to serve. There are no big shots in the kingdom of God, only servants. But in practical terms what does that mean? We'll find out today. We *must* find out today if we want to *get a grip* on the kind of life the Lord intends for us.

We've come to message #4 in our series, "*Get a Grip: Seven Values of a Strong Christian and Church.*" The Bible calls us to commit ourselves to seven essentials.

#1-3—We must be committed to worship, to edification, and love (from weeks 1-3).

#4—As we'll see today, we must value *service*, i.e. be willing to do the little things.

#5-7—In future weeks, we'll see the need to value evangelism, fellowship, and obedience.

The subject before us today is critical, both for you as a person and for us as a church. The Lord wants us to value service. How do we know? We see Him taking three very specific actions in the Bible that make it perfectly clear just how important service is.

I. The Lord modeled service (Matt 20:28).

One day the mother of James and John came to Jesus to request a favor. "Grant that my sons can sit on your right hand and left hand in your kingdom (Matt 20:21)." The question infuriated the rest of the disciples. Jesus used the teachable moment to correct their faulty view of leadership (Matt 20:25-27):

"You know that the 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 your slave."

There is no top of the totem pole in the kingdom. We don't climb ladders. We stoop to use water basins. The greatest leader is the one who serves. Indeed, the most effective person in God's work is the one who sees himself as a *slave*.

That's a foreign concept in a self-seeking world. It shouldn't have been foreign to the disciples, however, for they'd witnessed servant-leadership for three years. What the Master asked them to do was what He Himself had done before their very eyes. Of that fact He reminded them in His next statement (verse 28), "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

According to His own words here, the Lord modeled service in two ways.

A. He served by coming. The Son of Man *came* to earth. Talk about lowering your standard of living! He whom angel hosts adore left the splendor heaven and came to earth.

Paul reflected on this divine demotion in Philippians 2:6-7, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the *very nature of a servant*, being made in human likeness." But His service went a step further...

B. He served by giving His life. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and [here's

how He served] to *give his life* as a ransom for many." What a ransom payment Jesus paid! It wasn't money. He gave up His life.

Eight centuries before Jesus uttered these words, the prophet Isaiah predicted what the Messiah would do. In fact, He referred to Him as "The Servant." Isaiah 52:13-14—"See, *my servant* will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness..." (see also 53:11)

The reason The Servant came in the first place pertains to a fundamental problem we have. In fact, it's a *serving problem*. We serve the wrong master.

Of course, the Bible makes it clear that God alone is to be served. We see this theme throughout the Old Testament. Moses exhorted the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:13, "Fear the LORD your God, *serve him only* and take your oaths in his name." Joshua repeated the charge in Joshua 24:14-15, "Now fear the LORD and *serve him* with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and *serve the LORD*... As for me and my household, we will *serve the LORD*."

Sadly, however, the Israelites soon forgot the charges by Moses and Joshua. Judges 2:11 tells what happened just one generation after Joshua died, "Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and *served the Baals*."

And that remains our problem to this day. Romans 1:25 describes the plight of fallen man, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and *served created things rather than the Creator*—who is forever praised."

There's our proclivity. The natural man doesn't want to serve the Creator. For selfish reasons he sells his soul to created things, but in the end these become a noose around his neck.

That's why The Servant came, my friend. Jesus came, not to be served but to serve. The Master served us by giving His life for us. Yes, the Lord modeled service.

II. The Lord mandated service (John 13:12-17).

Let's return to the upper room account in John 13. There's one incident I omitted earlier. It's what happened when the Lord started to wash Peter's feet.

Verse 6—"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'" In typical fashion, Peter broke the silence. Can't you see Peter? He pulled his feet away from Jesus' hands. He resisted The Servant.

Verse 7—"Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'" The Lord is so patient, isn't He?

Peter blurted out in verse 8, "No, you shall never wash my feet." Peter thought he was being tactful. To him, the nonsense had gone far enough. If none of the others were going to say something, he would. How absurd that the Master would wash the feet of His subjects! That didn't make sense. Somebody had to put a stop to this.

Jesus answered Peter in verse 8, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Those words cut Peter to the core. The term "part" means "share" or "portion." Peter, if I don't wash you, you can't be my partner!

That hit Peter like a ton of bricks. To Peter, the thought of having no part with Jesus was intolerable. He loved his Lord. Remember, it was Peter who pleaded for the privilege of coming to Jesus on the water, who

later followed when the soldiers arrested Him, and who rushed into the empty tomb trying to find the Master.

Jesus' warning caused Peter to change his tune quickly. Verse 9—"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Peter was a man of extremes. One minute he opposed a foot-washing. Now he welcomes a shower!

But he missed the point, as Jesus explained in verse 10, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you [the disciples] are clean, though not every one of you [speaking of Judas]."

We learn two important truths from this story.

A. We're saved because He served. "You are *clean*," Jesus told the disciples. Why were they clean? It wasn't because of the foot-washing. That was just an illustration. They were clean because, to use Jesus' term, they'd had a "bath." When a person turns from his sin and turns to Jesus, Jesus makes him absolutely clean. On the basis of His atoning work at the cross, He removes the sinner's sin-stains.

But as those who've experienced the "bath" move through life, something happens. Their feet pick up dirt from the world. Do they need another bath? No, a foot washing will do, from Jesus. They need Jesus to cleanse them from the stain of specific sins.

Let me speak more directly. Some here today need a bath. You need Christ to cleanse you from sin. You may be a good person. You may even be a religious person. But your heart is black with sin. And your sins have separated you from God. You need to be cleansed. You need to be saved.

And you can be this morning. How? By admitting your sinfulness, repenting of your sin, and looking by faith to the cross. It was on the cross that Christ washed away the sins of His people. Come to Jesus for a bath!

But for others here today, the problem is different. You've had the bath, but your feet are dirty. Yes, Christ has saved you, but as you've been walking through this sinful world you've become soiled. You've sinned. You don't need another bath. But you do need to allow Christ to wash your dirty feet, and thus, to make you fit for service again.

Will you look to Him now? John 13 makes it clear that we are saved on the basis of this (and this alone), *because He served*. That brings us to a second truth in John 13.

B. We're saved in order to serve. Verse 14 again, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should *wash one another's feet*."

By God's design, salvation always leads to service. Jeremiah 15:19—"Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you *that you may serve me*..."

God saves us so we can serve *Him*. And specifically, we serve Him by serving *His people*. That's what the Lord said. *Wash one another's feet*.

Paul explains further in Galatians 5:13, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, *serve one another* in love." (see also Romans 7:6)

Did you realize that serving is so important it's what we'll be doing in heaven? That's what Revelation 22:3 says, "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and *his servants will serve him* (see also Revelation 7:14-15)."

There's a Roman aqueduct at Segovia, Spain. It was built in 109 A.D. For eighteen hundred years, it carried

cool water from the mountains to the hot and thirsty city. Nearly sixty generations of men drank from its flow. Then came another generation, a recent one, who said, "This aqueduct is so great a marvel that it ought to be preserved for our children, as a museum piece. We shall relieve it of its centuries-long labor."

They did; they laid modern iron pipes. They gave the ancient bricks and mortar a reverent rest. And the aqueduct began to fall apart. The sun beating on the dry mortar caused it to crumble. The bricks and stone sagged and threatened to fall. What ages of service could not destroy idleness disintegrated.

We're inclined to think that it's better to be served than to serve. Wrong! We're saved in order to serve. Frankly, if we don't want to serve we have reason to question whether we've been saved. The Lord who modeled service also mandated service.

III. The Lord makes service possible.

The Lord is so good. He not only tells us what we should do, namely *serve*, but He enables us to do it. He's given us four things that make service possible for us.

A. He gave us examples. Many examples, in fact.

For starters, angels serve (Heb 1:14 "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?").

In the Old Testament, the priests served in the offering of sacrifices (Ex 28:1). The Kohathites served in the care of the tabernacle (Num 4:1-3). Hebrew males over the age of twenty served in the army (Num 26:1-2).

Throughout the Bible the Lord actually refers to His people as *servants*, such as in the case of Paul (Titus 1:1), Moses (Heb 3:5), James (James 1:1), Jude (Jude 1), and Tychicus (Col 4:7). To teach us how to serve the Lord gave us examples. Let's take a quick look at five of them. Pay attention to the various ways they served.

1. *Paul served by preaching (Acts 20:17-21)*. In Acts 20 Paul said this to his friends from Ephesus, "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. *I served the Lord with great humility* and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house." Paul served by preaching.

2. *Timothy served by assisting (Phil 2:19-22)*. A great servant-text is Philippians 2:20-22, where Paul shares this testimony about Timothy: "I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he *has served with me in the work of the gospel*."

Timothy wasn't a glory-hog. He served by assisting and we can learn several things from him. Based on what Paul said about Timothy, God-honoring service involves:

--a genuine interest in the welfare of others --a refusal to think of your own interests

--a determination to be like Jesus Christ --a track record

--hard work --a devotion to the gospel

3. *Epaphras served by praying (Col 4:12)*. Colossians 4:12 says, "Epaphras, who is one of you and a *servant of Christ Jesus*, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured."

4. *Dorcas served by helping the poor (Acts 9:36)*. Remember her? She's the woman from Joppa whose death caused the widows in the church to cry so much that Peter raised her from the dead. Luke wrote of her in Acts 9:36 that she "was always doing good and helping the poor."

5. *The Macedonian churches served by giving (2 Cor 8:1-5)*. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5— "And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this *service to the saints*. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will."

One of the reasons the Lord gave us these examples is to show us there are *many* ways to serve. We can serve by preaching, assisting, praying, helping the poor, and by giving money—and that certainly isn't the limit! You might wonder, "If there are different ways to serve, how does the Lord want *me* to do it?" To answer that question you need to grasp something else the Lord has done to make service possible.

B. He gave us gifts (1 Peter 4:10-11). Spiritual gifts, that is. If you are a Christian you have a spiritual gift (or endowment). At the moment of regeneration, the Holy Spirit entered your life. When He did He gave you a *charismata*, a spiritual gift. There are four New Testament texts that explain the subject—Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. Let's investigate the latter for now.

1 Peter 4:10-11—"Each one should use whatever gift he has received *to serve others*, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it 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."

Based on Peter's instruction, we learn four guidelines for serving.

1. *Serve according to your gift*. "Each one should use *whatever gift he has received to serve*." There are about twenty spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, such as the gifts of administration, teaching, faith, knowledge, and mercy. Peter seems to indicate that these gifts can be summarized into two categories. There are *speaking gifts* and *serving gifts*.

Answer this. If the Lord has given you a speaking gift, what type of ministry should you exercise in the church? You should serve God's people by getting involved in *speaking* ministries—like teaching, or leading a Bible study. What if you possess a serving gift? Then the Lord wants you to help His people by plugging into a *service* ministry—like visiting shut-ins or maintaining the church property.

Please realize there is no one way to serve. The Lord gifts us differently so we may minister in a variety of ways. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are *different kinds of service*, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men."

2. *Serve for the good of others*. Listen to Peter again, "Each one should use whatever gift he has received *to serve others*." God has given you something that others in the church need. Peter says to use it for their good.

3. *Serve in dependence on God*. Verse 11—"Do it with the strength *God provides*." God provides the gift. God also provides the strength to use it.

4. *Serve for the praise of God*. God didn't gift us so we could make a name for ourselves. The proper use of gifts will result, Peter says, in the praise of God through Jesus Christ. The glory of God must be our aim in

service. Paul could say, "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God (Rom 15:17)." Is that true of you?

Now look again at the four guidelines and answer the following. Are you using your gift, for the good of others, in dependence on Him, and for His glory?

But there's more. Not only has the Lord given us examples and gifts...

C. He gave us a method (Eph 4:11-12). Ephesians 4:11-12 is the "method text." It explains how spiritual gifts are to be used in the church:

"It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers [in other words, Christ gave certain speaking gifts to the church; why?], to prepare God's people for *works of service* [So the Lord uses those with speaking gifts to equip the rest of His people to use their gifts in works of service; what's the ultimate intent?], so that the body of Christ may be built up."

There's God's method. There's how He intends for service to take place in His church. It's a team effort involving contribution from three parties.

1. *Pastors equip (Eph 4:11-12a; 1 Peter 5:2-3)*. I'm thankful the following *isn't* the case here, but it is in many churches. The pastor unlocks the church building on Sundays, checks the heat, leads the singing, preaches the sermons, makes the hospital visits, runs the bulletins, and entertains guest-missionaries. When asked why they don't do these ministries, congregation members respond, either, "Why should we? *He* is the minister," or, "How can we? He is the *minister* (in other words, he's the one who is gifted and trained for ministry, not us)."

But look again at the method. What is the pastor's job? Is it to *do the ministry*? No. It's to prepare the saints. It's to train them. It's to lead them into action, not as a dictator but a shepherd (1 Pet 5:2-3).. By God's design, pastors equip.

2. *The saints do works of service (Eph 4:12b)*. The pastor is the coach. The saints are the players. He prepares them for the game, but they play it.

3. *Deacons set the pace (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-10)*. In Acts 6, you'll recall that the church leaders in Jerusalem were being overwhelmed by the care of the widows. The leadership team replied, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables (Acts 6:2)." Their proposal? Have the church select seven godly men and delegate the benevolent ministries to them. And so they did.

It's everybody's calling in the church to serve, but God has given us a special group of men to set the pace. He calls them, *diakonous*, "deacons." Ironically, the term simply means "a servant."

Deacons aren't to do all the ministry any more than pastors are. Their role is to model for the church what servanthood is all about. That's why they must meet a high standard, given in 1 Timothy 3:8-10, "Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, *let them serve* as deacons."

There's one more thing the Lord gave us to make service possible—examples, gifts, a method, and...

D. He gave us a place to serve (Rom 12:4-8). *Where* are we to serve? Let there be no misunderstanding. Our service begins in the *local church*.

In Romans 12 Paul likens the church to a body: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and

these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (4-5)."

If I severed my hand from my body, my hand would be in trouble—it can't survive on its own—and my body would be in trouble, too—it could no longer accomplish certain tasks, like buttoning my shirt and tying my shoes.

It's no different in the Body of Christ. Paul drives home the point in verses 6-8, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage..."

You see, God not only gave us examples, gifts, and a strategy for service. He also gave us a *place* to serve. The place is the local church. You say, "Well, can't I serve the Lord outside the church, such as at work or in community service?" The answer is, sure (Paul talks about serving on the job in Eph 6:7-8 & 1 Tim 6:1-2). But your ministry outside the church must be the overflow of your service *inside* the church.

Here's why. When God saved you, He made you a part of a body, just one part. And He gave you a gift that the Body needs, and the rest of the Body gifts that you need. Let the implications of that sink in. Simply put, when it comes to service...

1. *My church needs me.* And...

2. *I need my church.* That's why church-hopping is so tragic. It's bad for the person who hops and for the church. It's also why pew-sitting is wrong. God didn't give me a gift so I could hoard it, but so I could serve. I need my church. It needs me.

I challenge you. Don't just attend church. Be *devoted* to it.

During World War II, England needed to increase its production of coal. Winston Churchill called together labor leaders to enlist their support. At the end of his presentation he asked them to picture in their minds a parade which he knew would be held in Picadilly Circus after the war.

First, he said, would come the sailors who had kept the vital sea lanes open. Then would come the soldiers who had come home from Dunkirk and then gone on to defeat Rommel in Africa. Then would come the pilots who had driven the Luftwaffe from the sky.

Last of all, he said, would come a long line of sweat-stained, soot-streaked men in miner's caps. Someone would cry from the crowd, 'And where were you during the critical days of our struggle?' And from ten thousand throats would come the answer, 'We were deep in the earth with our faces to the coal.'

Not all the jobs in a church are prominent and glamorous. But it is often the people with their "faces to the coal" who help the church accomplish its mission.

Beloved, this church needs every member the Lord has granted it, including *you*.

It's such a privilege to serve. Paul testified in 1 Timothy 1:12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, *appointing me to his service.*" Can you say that? Would you like to be able to?

Make It Personal: Two questions to make service a reality...

1. *What has the Lord given me?* In order to serve you must identify your gift.

2. *Will I use it for Him this week?* Will you use your towel and basin this week? We'll be glad we did, brethren, when the judgment day comes and we hear the words of the Master, "Well done, *good and faithful servant* (Matt 25:23)."