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Title: The Perfect Servant

Text: Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! ⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

I trust you are finding some pleasure in our political process. It's not too hard to find a lot of cheering and excitement and adulation when certain politicians take the stage these days. The media has used the term "rock star." I, perhaps mistakenly, thought that would not be a term that appropriately describes the intended role of a politician. Neither would I think that that is the image one would want to project, but, at times, it appears otherwise. Have you heard a recent politician's definition of a politician? Poli - many. Tics - blood suckers. The proper intended description is a PUBLIC SERVANT. I don't think I've heard that term used as often as it used to be, but that is what a politician is supposed to be - a PUBLIC SERVANT. And without telling you who to vote for, I won't hesitate to say that we would do well to elect a REAL public servant. We don't hear that term as often as we used to - the media much prefers "rock star" - but that is what a politician really is.

I've also heard the media use the term "rock star" to describe mega-church pastors - the ones who have achieved celebrity status. I'm thinking that can't be a flattering term for someone who is to be emulating Christ. I can't imagine that a pastor could feel comfortable in the role of celebrity, though some appear to. Have you heard the song "Would Jesus Wear A Rolex? I assume the song was written tongue-in-cheek. Here are the words:

Woke up this mornin', turned on the TV set.
There in livin' color, was somethin' I can't forget.
This man was preachin' at me, yeah, layin' on the charm.
Askin' me for twenty, with ten-thousand on his arm.
He wore designer clothes, and a big smile on his face.
Sellin' me salvation while they sang Amazin' Grace.
Askin' me for money, when he had all the signs of wealth.
I almost wrote a check out, yeah, then I asked myself.

Would He wear a pinky ring? Would He drive a fancy car?
Would His wife wear furs and diamonds? Would His dressin' room have a star?
If He came back tomorrow, well there's somethin' I'd like to know:
Could ya tell me, Would Jesus wear a Rolex on His television show?

Would Jesus be political if He came back to earth?
Have His second home in Palm Springs, yeah, to try to hide His worth?
Take money, from those poor folks, when He comes back again.
And admit He's talked to all them preachers who say they been a talkin' to Him?

Just ask yerself, Would He wear a pinky ring? Would He drive a fancy car?
Would His wife wear furs and diamonds? Would His dressing room have a star?
If He came back tomorrow, well there's somethin' I'd like to know:
Could ya tell me, Would Jesus wear a Rolex - Would Jesus wear a Rolex -
On His television show - ooh - ooh?

The problem appears to be that people - the masses - are drawn to celebrity. There is a fascination with famous people, sometimes to the point of obsession. The public clamors to know all the details of the lives of the rich and famous - and if they should be embroiled in a scandal, that often makes it even better. The world at large seems to love famous people and even love for famous people to act like famous people. ILLUSTRATION: When Rock Hudson first arrived in Hollywood, and was just getting his break into the movie business, his agent took him to lunch at an expensive high

profile Hollywood restaurant, as an opportunity for him to be seen by the gawkers as well as the power brokers. When Hudson had finished his meal, he politely placed his silverware on his plate and meticulously folded his napkin, and also put it on the plate, so the waiter could easily take it away. His manager rebuked him. He said, "It's not your job to clean up after yourself. You're not a busboy. You're a movie star. You need to act like one." In a way, that's what we expect from celebrities, to have the attitude that says, "I'm rich and famous, I'm one of the elite, I'm a star, and it's everyone's job to wait on me hand and foot." We live in a culture that worships celebrity - and of all the ill-advised things to worship, this should be at the top of the list - in politics, sports, business, and even in ministry. Our fascination with fame distorts our perception of what greatness really is. And it distorts our perception of what kind of person we should admire and aspire to be.

Last week we saw that Jesus was - is - God in the flesh. The Eternal God became a man and dwelt among us. He came to show us what a relationship with God is all about. We also saw last week that our objective is to know Him and become like Him.

Today's message highlights an aspect of Christ's character that anyone can imitate. Romans 12 would indicate that some are particularly gifted in this area, but there is a calling to all of us to follow Jesus in this area - in His example. There are many things about Christ that you can't copy: You're not pre-existent. You didn't create the universe. You can't die for the sins of the world. You'll probably never walk on water, and so on. But there is one aspect of Jesus' character that you CAN fully and completely imitate. In this, you can be like Him. Romans 12:7 tells us - "*If your gift is serving others, serve them well...*" **THERE IS NO GREATER EXAMPLE OF BEING A SERVANT THAN JESUS!**

Now, if anyone deserved the rock star treatment, it was Jesus. If anyone deserved to be treated like a celebrity, waited on hand and foot, it was Jesus. But that's not what happened. John says that, "*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him*" (John 1:10-11). He could have demanded such treatment. He could have lived like royalty during His time on earth - but He didn't. Because He came, instead, to show us what true greatness really looks like - what true greatness is, and what true greatness does. When we look to Jesus, we not only lose our fascination with celebrity, but we also get an idea of what our own lives should look like. In the final hours of Jesus' life, He said to His disciples, "*For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves*" (Luke 22:27). He also said, "*the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve*" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus' ministry on earth was a ministry of humble service. During this time His disciples witnessed some amazing things - more miracles than they could count, people healed of every type of affliction, including at least two who were raised from the dead. They saw forces of nature obey His command, and they saw the demons tremble at His name. They heard Him teach with authority and they saw the power of God at work through Him. There was nothing about Jesus that was weak or timid, and yet, in the midst of all this power, there was an underlying attitude of humble service toward others. That's what drove Him and that's what defined Him.

I want us to look, very quickly, at three events in Jesus' life that reflect this attitude of humble service. The first is something we're all familiar with: His birth.

- 1. The Circumstances of His Birth.** The Christmas story shows us that from the very beginning, Jesus' life was all about humanity. He could have announced His birth to King Herod, or to the religious leaders of Jerusalem, or to Augustus Caesar, Emperor of Rome. He could have announced His birth to the greatest of the great, and He could have persuaded them that it was in their best interests to receive Him well. But that's not what He did. Instead, to whom did He announce His birth? First, to a young teenage girl who was about to get married. Then, to her bewildered fiancé. And then to some priests of another religion - astronomers - who traveled for months to find Him. And then to a group of nomadic shepherds - minimum wage workers on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder. And where was this King of all kings born? Not in a palace, but in a stable. Not surrounded by servants and staff, but surrounded by barnyard animals. The circumstances of His birth tell us that there was nothing pretentious about Jesus. No sense of entitlement, no expectation of special treatment. Instead we see an attitude in Him that says, "What's good enough for those of simple means, is good enough for me." If anyone had the right to say, "This day is all about me and I'm going to do it in style," - Jesus had that right. But that simply isn't His way. The circumstances of His birth also tell us that Jesus is not easily impressed with power and prestige. He didn't seek the approval of the elite. He chose, instead, to use a young peasant girl and a working class carpenter, Persian priests and simple shepherds, because these people - the ones whom society often overlooks and whom history is never likely to remember - these people matter to Him. On the mission field you encounter two kinds of missionaries. Some come in as rich Americans or rich Europeans, they live in affluence, they have the nicest house in town, and they "reach down" to minister to others. And then

there are those missionaries - and you find them all over the world - who come into the community they're called to serve and live among them, becoming one of them in every way. Can you guess which approach Jesus would take? In the circumstances of His birth, we can learn a lesson. God has called each one of us, in our own situation, to live a common life with those around us. No sense of entitlement. No expectation of special treatment. No chasing after prestige. When you demand that you be given special treatment from others, you're demanding for yourself something that Jesus never demanded for Himself. His attitude was, "What's good enough for those of simple means is good enough for me." This should be our attitude as well. The second event from Jesus' life is actually something that happened several times; we'll look at a couple of examples.

2. His Low-Key Approach to Public Recognition. In Matthew 8, a leper came to Jesus and said, "*Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*" The Bible says that Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. This, in itself, tells us volumes about Jesus. Lepers were the untouchables of first century Jewish culture, and yet He reached out His hand to the man. And as He touched him, He said, "*I am willing. Be clean.*" And then Jesus said something that leaves many confused - "*See that you don't tell anyone*" (Matthew 8:4). In the very next chapter, Matthew 9, Jesus restored the sight of two blind men, and then the Bible says, "*Jesus warned them sternly, 'See that no one knows about this'*" (Matthew 9:30). In Mark 7, Jesus healed a man who could neither hear nor speak. The man came to Jesus in a crowd, but Jesus took him aside, away from the others, away from the center of attention, where He could be alone with the man. He healed the man, so that he was able to hear and speak. And the Bible says that Jesus commanded him not to tell anyone (Mark 7:36). We see this again and again in the gospels: Jesus performs a miracle, and says, "Don't tell anyone about it." Why would He tell them not to tell anyone? Some have speculated that He didn't want to draw huge crowds that would restrict His movements, or that He didn't want to make His entire ministry about healing people. I never found either of those explanations satisfactory. I don't recall that the Bible ever tells us why Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone." The Bible only says that He said it. We can speculate about why, but one thing is sure: Jesus had no interest in using people to promote His ministry. Can you imagine today a celebrity preacher or a celebrity politician doing something good for someone - and NOT using it to further his agenda? We've developed this idea today that it's all about the buzz you can create for yourself. If you want to be successful in any endeavor, you need to tap into the power of social media and get everyone talking about you. Let everyone see all the good things you are doing, so that even more people will get on board and more people will buy in to the vision and more people will spread the news to everyone around them, and on and on and on it goes. This way, every good deed becomes an investment in public relations: "We spent \$10,000 helping these people, but we reaped a windfall in publicity." Whenever I see the TV commercials filled with sad-faced children living in abject poverty, like anyone with any feelings at all, I'm moved by the images. But, I also can't help but wonder what happened after they turned off the camera. Did they give those children something to eat? Did they wash their dirty hands and faces and comb their hair and give them clean clothes to wear? Did they play games with them and give them a reason to laugh? Or did they just pack their gear and move on to the next location? There's a fine line for relief organizations to walk, and it takes wisdom to do it right. On the one hand, people need to know what the conditions of poverty are like. On the other hand, you don't want to exploit the people you're called to serve, just so you can be more successful at getting the word out. Now, before I get too far off topic, I want to bring this back to what Jesus said to the people He helped. When Jesus healed a hurting person, he made it clear to them: "I'm not using you to promote My ministry. I'm not doing this for positive PR, or for the crowds it will draw, or for the fame that will come My way. I don't need you to be my walking advertisement. I'm doing this because I care about you. You matter, and that's enough." The lesson we can take from Jesus' attitude toward self-promotion is this: We can do good for others, not because of any benefit that might come back our way, but simply because that other person is worth it - whether we get recognition or not. Now, let's look at the third event in Jesus' life.

3. His Personal Needs Took Second Place to His Purpose in Life. In Luke 9, a man comes along and tells Jesus that he will follow Him wherever He goes. Jesus simply says, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*" (Luke 9:56). Jesus said this, so that the man would know that following Him comes with a price. The life of a Jesus follower is not always an easy life. But in saying this, Jesus also tells us something about Himself. He's telling us that, as far as He is concerned, His life is more about the ministry He's called to do, than it is about creating a certain level of comfort for Himself. In His ministry, Jesus was an itinerant rabbi. Not homeless, but on the road all the time. And it was a life not without hardship. But

for Jesus, it was worth it. He was willing to spend His time traveling from town to town, sleeping sometimes under the open skies, because He was fulfilling His purpose on earth. And for Jesus, fulfilling His purpose was more important than living in comfort. There's a great story in John 4 in which Jesus and the disciples are traveling through Samaria. They stopped at a well, and the Bible says that Jesus was tired, so He sent the disciples into town to buy some food. While Jesus was at the well, He had a conversation with a Samaritan woman that resulted in her salvation. When the disciples came back with the food, they asked Jesus to eat something, and He said, "*I have food to eat that you know nothing about*" (John 4:32). Of course, they didn't know what He was talking about, so He explained it to them. "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work*" (John 4:34). It was like He was saying to the disciples, "I just had this amazing conversation with a woman who experienced a complete life transformation. She is learning now to worship God in spirit and truth, and she's telling everyone she knows about it. Who can think of food at a time like this?" We see in the gospels that Jesus' top priority was not looking after His own needs and seeing to His own comfort. His top priority was, above and beyond all else, to do what the Father commanded Him to do: to fulfill His purpose on earth by SERVING THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. We see this again near the end of Jesus' life, just days before His death, when He took a towel and bowl of water and washed His disciples' feet - the Bible says that He did this to show them the full extent of His love for them. Here's a lesson we can learn from Jesus' attitude. We all have a purpose in life - and it involves much more than just seeking a comfortable life for ourselves. In fact, when you're fully engaged in pursuing God's purpose, your own needs take second place. Your greatest satisfaction comes from the good that you do.

- 4. Conclusion.** If anyone had the right to say, "It's all about me," Jesus had the right. If anyone had the right to demand His way and say, "Do you have any idea who you're talking to?" Jesus had the right. If anyone had the right to demand preferential treatment, Jesus had the right. He had the right, but He never used it. Instead of seeking a life of comfort and fame, He chose a life of sacrificial service to others. We see it in His attitude: "What's good enough for everyone else is good enough for me. I'm here to minister to others, not use them to further my fame. Living out My purpose is more important than living in comfort." There are many things about Jesus that are beyond our ability to imitate, but taking on the attitude of a humble servant is something we all can do. Jesus came to show us what true greatness is, and He came to be a humble servant, because, as it turns out, they're the same thing. If you want to be great, He said, learn to be the servant of all (Matthew 20:26,27; Mark 9:35, 10:43,44). You will never be more like Jesus than when you're serving others. And, in this way, you can be just like Jesus...today.