

**SUNDAY 24<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**“Back to Basics – Service”**

**Scripture: 1 Cor 3:1-10 & verse 21**

Sometimes it is hard to step into the shoes of the people we read about in the Bible. They were a real group of people, living at a real point in time and a real place in time—moms and dads, children, singles, students, artisans, athletes, dealing with the rough and tumble of their days and trying to make their journey through life in much the same way that each of us is doing this morning.



And although they were Corinth in AD something and we are in Chelsea in 2023, the principles, and the practical elements are as vitally important for us this morning as back then.

Today we are talking about the word “service”. Paul had been called to service, as we all have been. It is not that some are called to Christ and then go on to service, but it is that to we are called by Christ to serve, just as Jesus called the disciples. He had a job for them to do. And wanted them to be involved.

Can you honestly say you are serving Jesus in the capacity He has called you to. We have not been called to simply sit, absorb, or learn. We have been called to grow and fish and feed. So where are you in this equation this morning?

**Let me put a question to you this morning: where are you today in relation to serving Jesus. Where do you wish to be and what do you need to do differently to get there?**

Most of us plod along with little consideration for our direction and intention and that is not what God called us to do. There is no time limit on serving Christ. Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Ministry *in* the body of Christ, *to* the body of Christ, *through* the body of Christ, is not something that we do in the hope that we can step up a few rungs as often happens in the secular world. Such as those who say, well if I can do such and such, then I will step up the ladder of success and others will say of me – you are such a great person. Jesus says – he who wants to be great among you should first become the servant of all.

Service is understood as the **Lord's work, using a variety of people anywhere He calls us to serve.**

**We were born to be involved in seeing unbelieving people become committed followers of Jesus Christ.**

The very existence of the church in Corinth was because of Paul doing the Lord's work. He was purposefully appointed to a specific responsibility, in the way in which God plans to purposefully appoint each one of us.

Many churches experience problems like the church in Corinth, with cliques developing. In that time, the members were forming

groups according to the personalities on the leaders. One group that followed Apollos; a group that followed Cephas; a group that followed Paul. It wasn't that Apollos or Paul or Cephas were trying to get a group, it was that the people wanted to jump on board to a leader and group they thought would be the best, and as a result there was division, there was worldliness, there was carnality, there was fleshliness, it was all very childish.

**The issue is not *who*; the issue is *what*. We live in a world that is preoccupied with *who*. The evangelical world is preoccupied with *who*. God is interested in *what*, first. “What is Apollos? What is Paul?” Answer: “They are only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord ... assigned to each their task.”**

Paul said: “All I was doing was being obedient to Jesus and the only reason I did what I did is because the Lord assigned my task. Paul says – I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.” God gave the ministry. He assigned the task.

God does not call us to serve so that we can walk around, preening our feathers about the task, saying “Do you know who I am, and do you know what I do?” So what? The only reason you do what you do is because God said you could do it, and up until now, He still lets you do it. God gave you the task.

God's rewards are not going to be given based on success. They're going to be given based on faithfulness. He gave the task, He made it grow, He gives the rewards.

I think there is an ad for Superannuation that says: “We are all in this together” and how true is that for us as we serve the Lord in Chelsea. There is no “I” in Team – there is no room for segregation, cliques, saying this person is “in” but this person is “out.”

Paul was not a one-man band. He ensured that Apollos would join him. That proves that he’s not a one-man band. He knew the territorialism within the church. He knew there was a group that favoured Apollos. If he was looking out for his own interests, selfishly, he’d make sure that Apollos never went back to Corinth, because when Apollos went back to Corinth, maybe they would like his watering better than they liked Paul’s planting.

Back to my first question. You may recognise where you are this morning, and you may have ideas about how to get where you would like to be but infiltrating your plans is the devil. The devil tried hard to stop Paul, firing his darts, putting doubts and insecurities into Paul’s mind, even giving him a “thorn in the flesh” – but that didn’t stop him.

One of the reasons that people don’t grow as servants of God is because they are fearful. People are afraid of rejection: “I can’t possibly do that; No, I don’t think so; I don’t think I should do that. I might be rejected. I might not be accepted. I might not be as successful as I think I should. My “thorn in the flesh” holds me back; I am too old and frail; I am too young and inexperienced; I don’t have the time: I might not be able to bring my

perfectionistic standards to bear upon the task. I might not look good, I might not be good, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.”

Accept your limitations; you can't do everything, but God says, we all can do something.

Paul was committed to team ministry which was dramatically effective. Our servant journeys all look different as we are starting at our own personal point, wanting to take the next God-directed step. God helped Paul even with his own doubts, Paul's words were powerful as they were “a demonstration of the Spirit's power” in Corinth.

God uses a variety of people and there's no ideal place in which to serve Him. Paul was always looking ahead, always planning. There's nothing static about Paul. He's not in some little cottage somewhere on the top of a mountain where people trek just to kiss his fingers because he is such a mighty apostle.

He is saying, “Now, where can we go next, where can we share the Gospel and put out the devil? The guy's go, go, go, go! He's all the time thinking, “We can go there, we can do this, we can do that.” And people got to be saying, “Hang on, Paul, wait a minute!” Sometimes, I get that excited too and it can be either a good or bad thing?

Some of our vision doesn't go beyond the end of our nose. We're happy with “us four, no more, shut the door.” We're happy with a Bible study group, rub each other's backs, and turn ourselves into

great people, so we can all sit around and commend ourselves for being great people for the rest of our lives, while the world outside wonders, “Who in the world is this Jesus of Nazareth person?” The end is the evangelization of the world.

Paul certainly didn’t choose the places where he ministered. He was in the thick of the battle, accepted the challenges and the oppositions. He accepted them not as a hindrance but as a great privilege.

We have a choice today – we can live in cozy, comfortable, “us four, no more” evangelical Christianity and never experience opposition. We can silence our witness so well that no-one will ever say something bad about us. We can assume that because everybody likes us and thinks we are great, that we really are being effective for the gospel.

If this is the way we think and view things – then let me categorically say – we are anaemic, we are benign, we are ineffective, we are useless.

When the scrolls of the sorcerers were burnt in the city of Ephesus, it was not a political campaign to close the perversions of the goddess Artemis. It was not a 1-800 target against all the sorcerers in the city of Ephesus. It was the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And a lady whose life was consumed with reading palms began to read her Bible, and she closed her shop. And a man who was making a healthy living from prostitution and sexual perversion turned his life around and followed Jesus.

There's no ideal place in which to do the work of the Lord, except the place He puts you. There is a song where God asks: Whom shall I send and the response is: here am I, send me. I think we should emphasize the HERE. "**Here** am I"—reminding ourselves that we're **here**. We're not there; we're here. Half the time when we're here, we think about being there—wherever there is. "Well, if I wasn't here, I'd be there. And if I was there, it would be a whole lot more successful than this, I'm sure, because you know, I can't do much here but maybe I could over there!!!"

Many of us live our lives so that very few know what we are really like. But wouldn't it be great to have the goal on your epitaph that said: "He/She has been a great help to many people."

I'd encourage you to consider where you are now in serving God, then spend time in active prayer, listening to God's voice to guide you to where He wants you to go. To explore your options, you are most welcome to make a time for you and I to get together to chat; we may plan for a few of us to get together to discuss; or you may find the options within yourself. We all have the capacities within us to find directions suitable for us as we serve God.

**Prayer:** Father, thank You that You use a variety of people. Thank You that all of us are better off in a group than any of us are on our own. Forgive us for thinking that the work is our work and that we're special. Forgive us for despising the task that we might play or the task that others fulfill. And forgive us for always looking over our shoulders for greener pastures, more ideal

circumstances. Raise up a mighty army, we pray—for Your glory, for Chelsea and it surrounds greater good. Thank you that we are many, but You've made us one body, and that You love us in the way that a mother loves her newborn child. And we want to tell You that we love You too, and we desire to serve You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.