



Servant Leadership Lesson One: What in the World?

By Roy L. Moss

This original series of lessons on Servant Leadership is presented to stimulate consideration of what we are really doing in our positions as ministers. I do not intend for this to be perceived as me telling you what to do. Nor am I the example of proper service. I realize all too well many of the errors I have made in these areas over the years. Jesus is our example. We can safely walk in His footsteps. Let us together go where He has gone, in attitude, spirit and service.

Matt 20:25 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, **Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them.**

26 But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;

27 And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:

28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

The original disciples of Jesus did not have a good understanding of the nature of His kingdom and the leadership of it. I am not sure that nearly two thousand years down the road we have much more clarity about the matter.

The above scriptural declaration was called forth by Zebedee's family (his wife and two sons) seeking places of leadership, as they understood it, in the coming kingdom. They were seeking places of power and prominence in what they anticipated to be a replacement for the Roman Empire. Though

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our ambitions may not be quite so lofty, the basic desire for power and influence may not be much different. In this series of lessons I want to explore some of the contrasts between the two concepts of leadership, using illustrations from the life of Him who left us an example that we should follow in His steps (John 13:15; I Peter 2:21).

A great difference between worldly rulership and servant leadership is the matter of attitude or spirit. The rulers operating within this world's system are often in it for their own gain – of power, money, prestige, place and the ancillaries to which these open doors. The servant leader is there for the benefit of those s/he finds under his/her care.

There are hundreds of books on leadership available. Some are even written from a supposedly “Christian” perspective. The problem with many leadership books is that they, whatever they may claim, are built on a foundation of a worldly understanding of the goals of leading. Corporate principles are ‘churchified,’ and terminology is redefined and relabeled, but the basic premise of power and control remains the same.

Many years ago a young man in the church I pastored wanted to be a preacher so he could “tell people what to do.” When he would not listen to my advice about the error of his goals, and when I would not sign for him to get a ministerial license, he moved to another church, then another organization, and began to preach with them. The tragedy that unfolded over the years was rooted in leadership founded on self rather than service. His was an extreme case as he left the ministry, quit going to church and died before getting back.

Jesus began His ministry with an example of how the servant leader will react to a need of those that he is not even technically leading. The story in John 2 gives us insight on the highest level of this kind of leadership.

The Servant Leader Is More Concerned About People And Their Problems Than Schedules

We know that the first miracle Jesus performed was changing the water to wine at the wedding in Cana. But what was supposed to be the first miracle? Was a spectacular healing on the agenda? Whatever may have been

planned, we know from Jesus' comment to His mother that at least the timing was off schedule. And the wedding would not continue long enough to qualify for such proper timing. This refreshment problem was neither earth shaking nor a national crisis, but a matter of a young couple and their families facing a situation that would embarrass them in their community. Embarrass? Is a potential embarrassment enough to change the timing of God and produce a miracle?

Let us look at this from another angle. A loyal servant will try to make his master look good and prevent embarrassment. Jesus seems to have slipped into this mode and set aside his own agenda to cover the master's (this family's) lapse. The miracle was done quietly and with no fanfare, as a servant would do. The only ones who knew what happened were the other servants, who were motivated to silence by the same impulse. The implication of the text is that they knew the source of the wine, but did not broadcast that knowledge. After all, they were just servants.

We call him master (John 13:13), but often He acted more as a server at the beck and call of anyone who came with a need. His purpose in coming was to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:27-28; Mark 10:44-45). I remember many years ago when my father was contemplating going into business for himself. Someone encouraged him to do so because then he could be his own boss. My father had a clearer picture of the matter. He countered by observing that, "When you go into business everyone becomes your boss."

The problem in this world with studying servant leadership is that most of the time we put the emphasis on the word 'leadership' rather than on 'servant.' In the coming studies we will attempt to look at various aspects of His ministry from the door of the servants' quarters.