

Servants, Branches, and Vines

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung 8/8/2015

For today's sermon I have chosen a rather strange sounding title. We will be looking into the vital importance in a Christian's life of being a **servant** – and all that means. We will be taking a sharp look at the words that Jesus spoke on His last night with His disciples. He saved the last and best of His teachings for the very end. They are most important for us to grasp.

In one place that we will see, Jesus compares us to BRANCHES that must rely on Him as the source of life itself.

Specific Purpose Statement for this sermon: I wish to emphasize in this sermon the condition that we be Christian **servants** – if we expect to **draw from the source of life** – which is the VINE Jesus Christ.

God is giving us this time to go on to perfection. As a group – we did not reach perfection in the days of Worldwide. There was so much that the church was missing out on – and sadly – so many of the Church brethren are still stuck in time – unable to complete their growth process. There is a time of testing and trial for all the people of God.

God has graced us with additional time to come to spiritual maturity. We are going to see in today's sermon – that as mature Christians – it is this aspect of our lives – that of being a **servant** – that keeps us connected and **attached** to the True Vine, Jesus Christ.

For many years in God's Church we have been **fed** the **milk** of the word. We learned about the Sabbath and the Holy Days. We learned the vital importance of keeping God's commandments. We learned about clean and unclean meats. That was good to learn those things – but there is so much more. As Paul experienced, some congregations are stuck in rut of repeating their early days in the church over and over again...

2Timothy 3:7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the [full] knowledge of the truth.

1Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

1Corinthians 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

A babe is unable to digest solid spiritual meat – are we ready, brethren?

Time is growing short – it is high time that the things that we have learned over the years be turned into solid spiritual growth and development. Time is of the essence.

There have been a lot of sermons about Jesus being Lord and Master, but not so much on Jesus as a **servant**. Jesus wants us to understand that primarily He came as a **servant** – and He fully expects that we be **servants** as well.

We need to talk about the significance of our being servants as well. For some, being a servant is not a very attractive prospect. Being a servant has gotten a bad name: A bad rap! For the most part, public servants are not servants any longer. It's all about them and what they want – instead of serving the needs of others. It is a terrible example to the younger generations to grow up with.

Being a servant might not be such a nice sentiment, but it is an absolute requirement if we are to serve with Christ for a thousand years in the soon to be here - millennium. Who is a servant and how does God view servants?

Jesus set the example for us – Jesus Christ **gave His all** in serving us. He is a servant and He fully expects us to be servants also.

Do not ever think that serving is someone else's job. Serving is not only for the ministry in God's Church – who frankly – have done a very poor job of demonstrating what leadership – **servant style** leadership – is all about.

The cry going out in the days of Worldwide should have been, "**servant living**," instead of a **feigned** "servant leadership," which did not resolve the problem of heavy-handed ministers. The ministry of the Worldwide Church of God should have taught the brethren to serve one another as Christ selflessly served – not by exercising lordship or dominion over the brethren as Christ explains in Luke 22:25: "And [Jesus] said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship [have dominion] over them; and they that exercise authority [control] upon them are called benefactors."

2Corinthians 1:24 We do not have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

A Christian servant is one who, even when in a position of leadership points people to the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus served until the end – and He did that as an example that we do the same.

To be great in the Kingdom of God, we must become the **spiritual servant**, maid, janitor, waiter, and nurse of others. That is a class of people that are not usually held in high esteem by today's "In crowd." In general servants are looked down upon. Sadly, in this day and time, while servants are despised, the most sought after positions are at the top and being in charge.

It seems that the goal of our culture and society is toward personal fulfillment, happiness, and comfort rather than the needs of other people. We are living in an age when increasingly the populace is narcissistic, self-absorbed, and self-important, while lacking empathy toward others. Jesus felt the needs of others.

Hebrews 4:15 For we have not an high priest [Jesus Christ] which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

People pursue their own comfort, pleasure and satisfaction rather than serving the good of all men with mature Christian behavior.

The disciples of Christ were the same – they were carnal and unconverted when Jesus was instructing them. Every one of them wanted to be a big wheel – in charge. The disciples sought after high positions at the top.

Luke 22:23 And [the disciples] began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should [betray Jesus].

Luke 22:24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

They had just taken the Passover with Jesus Christ – not 10 minutes before – and they are openly fighting among themselves as to who was accounted the greatest among them.

Luke 22:25 And [Jesus] said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

Jesus says the Kingdom of God does not work like the **kingdoms** of men.

Luke 22:26 **But you shall not be so:** but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth **serve**.

Jesus says "Don't seek to exercise authority upon the others... Be at the bottom of the totem pole – not the top man.

Note the most important Scripture we will see today! Jesus asks them a defining question.

Luke 22:27 For who is greater, the one who reclines {at the table} or the one who **serves**? Is it **not** the one who reclines {at the table?}

That is the way it is in the world – the one who is being **waited** on hand and foot is the greater. He is the big chief. "But," – Jesus says "**but**." That means there is something wrong with that picture.

Luke 22:27 ...But, I am among you as the one who **serves**.

Brethren, there is our example to follow. Jesus is pointing out that He is a **servant** – and that is the way the Kingdom of God operates. Jesus came as a servant - giving us the example to be servants as well. It does not lower a person to serve another. The world looks at it that way, but the world is wrong.

Before we can rule with Christ during the millennium, it is absolutely necessary that we learn to be servants in the manner that Jesus was a servant. Not looking for praise, power, status, glory, or even recognition, but in the humility of Jesus Christ seeking only the will of God. Jesus said:

John 5:30 ... I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

The deep meaning of the Footwashing service has been greatly under-rated in the past. Some people think that the Footwashing is for the sole purpose of teaching us to be **humble**. Many of us were taught that. It was presented like this: “How **demeaning** it is to get down of the floor and wash someone’s grubby feet – how **humiliating** – I’m so glad that’s over with for another year!” Brethren, there is so much more to the Footwashing than that.

The footwashing custom was a servant’s menial task in the days of the apostles. The Footwashing does require that we have a humble attitude – that is true, but it means **much more** than merely humbling ourselves by washing the feet of others.

We must **be careful** not to fall into the trap of acquiring a false humility as a result of the Footwashing ceremony. The Pope **prides** himself in washing the feet of 12 other men – one of them a Muslim. (By the way the 12 men were not allowed to wash the Pope feet in return.)

The 1907 edition of The Catholic Encyclopedia contains no article specifically on the ‘Footwashing’ as its significance was entirely lost on unbelievers. In the same way we must be careful not to think **highly** of ourselves for our willingness to **lower** ourselves to wash the feet of anybody at the Passover service.

By His example, Jesus was teaching us how to **serve** others just **as** He has done. The Footwashing is about learning to **serve one another** in a **spiritual way**. Spiritual serving is hard and difficult – it takes the Spirit of God and the Power of God.

However, not having yet received God's Holy Spirit, the disciples could not understand the **spiritual** aspect of the ceremony Jesus was establishing.

John 13:6 "Then came Jesus to Simon Peter: and Peter said unto Him, Lord, is it for you to wash my feet?"

Peter was saying – “don’t you have it backward Lord?” Jesus had so much to teach the Apostles.

John 13:7 Jesus answered and said unto [Peter], What I do thou know not now; but thou shall know hereafter.

This is a telling incident that takes place early in the Footwashing service.

John 13:8 Peter saith unto [Jesus], Thou shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou have **no part** with me.

Let me fast forward here for a moment: Jesus has shown the apostles that He has great **plans** for them. In the Book of Revelation we are told “that great city, the holy Jerusalem descending from heaven...

Revelation 21:12 Had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

Revelation 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve **foundations**, and in them the **names** of the **twelve apostles** of the Lamb.

Peter is to be a **part** of the foundation of the heavenly Jerusalem, and Jesus tells Peter that the lessons of the Footwashing are so **important** that if Peter opts out – Jesus says, “If I wash thee not, thou have **no part** with me.”

John 13:12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, **Do you know what I have done to you?**

They did not have a clue. But God gave a clue very early on.

1 Samuel 25:41 Abigail arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a **servant to wash the feet of the servants** of my lord.

Abigail was an antecedent - a precursor of Jesus being a servant's servant. It is a perfect example of the Footwashing at Jesus' last Passover when He made it clear that He was a **servant** to the disciples, a servant's servant. Jesus was teaching **us** of the imperative necessity to be **servants** – rather than top dogs. Yes, Jesus is God – come in the flesh – but notice how God operates – He functions as a servant.

John 13:13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

Joh 13:14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also are **duty-bound to wash one another's feet.**

John 13:15 For I have given you an **example**, that ye should do exactly as I have done to you.

Jesus says – let's get our priorities straight here:

John 13:16 Truly, truly, I say unto you, The **servant** is not greater than his lord; neither is a messenger that is sent greater than he who sent him.

Jesus Christ is a **servant** as an example to us. Paul shows us how to apply this principle of Christian service in our own lives.

Philippians 2:4 Look not every man on his own interests, but every man also on the [needed essentials] of others.

Philippians 2:6 [Jesus], being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

Jesus is Emmanuel – God come in the flesh. He set aside His glory as God and His reputation and authority...

Philippians 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a **servant**, and was made in the likeness of men:

Phi 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Now – that is humbling – and **servicing** to the max.

Philippians 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name:

John 13:17 If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them.

Peter got the message loud and clear – Jesus was teaching of spiritual servants who would sacrifice everything in serving others.

John 13:37 Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? **I will lay down my life** for thy sake.

Brethren, we get to lay down our lives all the time – as well! All of John, Chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 – take place on that Passover evening and night before Jesus died.

Then follows conversation between Jesus and the disciples – and Jesus tells them of the soon coming of the Holy Spirit (14:16).

John 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;

John 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.

Jesus has a very specific purpose in sharing these thoughts with the disciples.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, it shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

We are servants of Jesus Christ right now. We are to give of ourselves – all of ourselves – as Christ gave us example. We can only do that by being **tapped** into Jesus. We are wholly insufficient of ourselves.

Matthew 20:25 But Jesus called [the ten disciples] 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.

Matthew 20:26 But it shall **not** be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your [servant].

Matthew 20:27 And whosoever will be [an exalted] chief among you, let him be **servant** of all:

Matthew 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be [**served**] unto, but to [**serve**], and to give his life a ransom for many.

We can only be servants of Christ by being **tapped** into Jesus – **drawing** on His Spiritual resources. The title of the sermon is from here: Jesus says:

John 15:1 I am the true **vine**, and my Father is the husbandman.

When we stand before Jesus Christ – and we will – what evidence of Christianity will we be able to present to Him.

John 15:2 Every branch [that's us] in **me** that bears **not fruit He takes away**: and every branch that bears fruit, he prunes it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

What fruit, Christian fruit, has your life borne?

John 15:3 Now ye are **clean** through the word which I have spoken unto you.

I believe that a lot of people make some bold assumptions when they come to verses 3 and 4. First they believe that they are doing everything necessary to be **clean**. This refers to our having been washed by the blood of Jesus and water of the Word.

Ephesians 5:26-27 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of **water by the word**, to remove every spot, wrinkle, and blemish.

And then another bold assumption, they assume that are the ones who abide in Christ. Everyone cannot take for granted that they abide in Christ. There are **qualifications** that must be met. Jesus is about to describe how it is that He is the **vine** – the umbilical cord, if you will through which all life and Spirit flow.

In Christ's analogy – it is the **sap** that flows through the grape-vine giving Spirit and life **to us**, the branch which is attached. The life and Spirit in the branch [us] must be fully the same Spirit and life as that in the Vine Christ].

Our calling, our *raison d'etre*, reason for living, is to be yielding up of ourselves as **servants** to one another, and laying our lives down as surely as Jesus did for what is righteousness in God's eyes. When Christ's life and Spirit are flowing into us – we are yielding our lives as servants to mankind – beginning at the house of God.

The lessons of the Footwashing are so important that without them we have no **part**; we are not connected; we are not abiding in the **vine**, Jesus Christ. We have to be serving as Jesus served – or we are not abiding in Him.

Who comes to Christ? It is definitely not everyone. If we are not **servicing** our brother and sister in need – as well as the cause of God before us – we are not abiding in Christ.

Being a servant of our brother and sister in Christ, **and a servant of God** is our daily task – if we are to “abide in Christ.”

Mark 8:34 And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will **come after me**, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

There it is again, the requirement of being a servant – being a daily sacrifice. Then Jesus explains the absolute necessity for a Christian **to lay down his life** in standing for the holy things of God.

Going along with the Tkaches was **not** laying down your life. Taking a stand **against** their false teachings and apostasy – and getting the ax for it – that’s laying your life down.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31 ...I die daily. Paul also said:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your **bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

In God’s eyes it is **reasonable** to put our lives on the line for righteousness every day – over and over again. That is being a **servant** of God.

We do not only preach the Gospel to all who will hear - **we live it** by being useful tools in the hand of God for others to see our works. We’ve got to be a living sacrifice because God sustains us – so that we can continue to lay our lives down for His cause. If we are not putting **everything** on the line – daily – weekly – as a pattern of our lives – we will not be in the Kingdom of God.

Have you ever said to God and fully meant it, “Take my life – so that this child may live?” Have you ever said to God and fully meant it, “I’m willing to lose everything – reputation, friends, standing in my community – in order to support your Way, O Lord, in this matter.” That was what Jesus did for us – that is what we too must be doing.

If we say, “I don’t want to jeopardize my job, my house, my security to come to the aid and rescue of a brother or sister, or to defend our Faith,” we place **our salvation** in peril.

Mark 8:35 For whosoever will [seek to] save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall **lose his life for my sake** and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.

Laying down our life as Jesus did – is the path to Salvation. If we think that it never comes up – that it is necessary to lay down our life for what we stand for – it’s time to find out what it means to lay down our life. Jesus continues:

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch [that’s us] cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine [Jesus Christ]; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

“Abide” means that we are **joined** to Christ by following His words, principles and way of life – especially that of being a **servant** who lays his life down so that others may attain the Kingdom of God. This follows John 13 where Jesus emphasized how important it is that we follow His example of being **servants**. Everyone is not connected to the vine. What is the **evidence** that we are connected and abiding in Christ?

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that **abides** in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

John 15:7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

John 15:8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

John 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

Jesus says that in order to ABIDE in Him – we must follow in His example of serving by giving of ourselves.

John 15:10 **If** ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

Jesus came not only to improve our lives – but to save them. Christianity is not a pleasure trip; it is a life of serving the needs of all. Like a slave to his master, submission to Christ and all His ways is **required** of a Christian.

When the world gets tough, the tough get going. But, how do we take on such a monumental job of serving? We say incorrectly to ourselves as we approach such an **intimidating** and daunting task, "I'm only one person?"

It's fine to be only **one** person because God expects us to act with spiritual integrity toward only **one** person or problem at a time. We are not the Savior of the world – Jesus is. As Christ's humble servants we are not expected to save the entire world – only make a difference in those men and women with whom we come into contact.

Collectively, however, Jesus declares that our example of unity would make a difference in the world. Notice:

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that **the world may believe** that thou hast sent me.

1Peter 2:18 **Servants**, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the **forward** – the harsh and unfair ones.

That is exactly what Jesus did – and He forgave His persecutors as He was dying on the cross. True Christian service is a heavy burden but the persecution of Jesus was greater than the burden we must carry. Jesus was marred more than any man.

Isaiah 52:14 As many were astonished at thee [Jesus on the cross]; His visage was so **marred more than any man**, and his form more than the sons of men:

No one of us will suffer more than Christ. It wasn't only Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus - I betrayed Him, you betrayed Him, and that suffering and pain of betrayal that He carried was more than any other man will ever have to carry. In all of this, Jesus was **servicing** us – giving to us – even at the cost of His life fading away...

John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Serving people brings more joy to our souls – than being served... Have you ever noticed that when you **serve** someone – it causes you to **love** them – and the **more** you serve them – the more you love them?

John 15:12 This is my commandment, That **ye love one another**, as I have loved you.

Here it is in a nut-shell:

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man **lay down his life** for his friends.

In the Old Testament, only one person is known as the friend of God – that was Abraham.

2Chronicles 20:7 Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gave it to the children of **Abraham thy friend** forever?

But, brethren – notice the invitation to you and me:

John 15:14 Ye are my friends, **if ye do** whatsoever I command you.

John 15:15 Henceforth I call you **not servants**; for the **servant** knows **not** what his lord doeth: but I have called you **friends**; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

We are privileged to be **servants** “in the know.” We know God – we are known by God – He has made us privy – sharing in the knowledge of His Plan. So we need to get to work brethren.

John 15:16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and **bring forth fruit**, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

John 15:17 These things I command you, that ye **love one another**.

Brethren, the Scriptures are clear, unless we are **servicing**; we have no **part** with Christ. We are the **servants** of Christ - living lives of Christianity until He returns.

Matthew 25:14 For the Kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his **goods**.

Christ’s “goods” are the spiritual standards of the word of God with which to serve our fellow man, and uphold the true doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1).

Matthew 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Jesus is a servant – and He is our example. Jesus said, “I am the vine;” Brethren, that is where we are fed.

Jesus’ way of life - is the **life** source that sustains us.

End: Servants, Branches and Vines