

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, July 24, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**Series: Every Christian a Minister**

**A Servant Lifestyle – Matthew 23:11; John 13:1-7**

**Introduction:** A few years ago, Dwight had been called by Doug Couch to pick up the Super WOW Bible Study materials from a local printer and deliver them to Jekyll Island. Dwight asked John Ford who had never been to Super WOW before to ride along with him. When they arrived at the convention center, Dwight spotted a few guys walking from the little shopping center across the street toward the convention center, so he stopped and asked them if they could help them unload the boxes of Bible Study materials. The men did, and after they had unloaded the boxes, Dwight and John left. As they were making their way to check in to a motel to get ready for the praise gathering that night, John asked Dwight, *“I can’t believe you just get people off the street to help do this kind of stuff. You’d better be more careful.”*

At the praise gathering that night, Dwight just sat back and watched John’s eyes pop out of his head as one-by-one, those very guys whom he had asked to help him earlier began to appear on the stage as the Super WOW staff. Then after the singing was over, John was even more stunned to see that one of those guys who had helped unload boxes was none other than Dave Edwards, the main speaker for the week. John turned to Dwight and said, *“Dwight, I can’t believe you did that! Those guys are on the program. They didn’t need to be unloading boxes!”* But Dwight said to John, *“Look, you don’t understand. Doug Couch made it very plain to everyone who has a part in leadership at Super WOW, that they are here to serve, and it doesn’t matter if you’re the speaker or the sweeper, if a job needs to be done, you’re no different than any other person – you jump in there and do it!”*

This morning in our continuing look at the idea that every Christian is to be a minister, we’ll be talking about our commitment to ministry and developing a servant lifestyle.

Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 23:11 (NIV)** *“The greatest among you will be your servant.”* The Disciples didn’t understand that statement, but just a few days later, they would be shown what it meant by the Master Himself as just after the first Lord’s Supper, Jesus would take a towel and wash their feet.

**John 13:1-7 (NIV)** *1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

As we explore this Scripture this morning, I hope we will discover some things that will help us understand what servanthood means and challenge us to adopt it as a lifestyle. First, I believe it would do us well to take a look at the word “greatness” and see if we can redefine what it means.

### **1. Greatness Redefined**

Our culture seems to have an obsession with being the greatest. Muhammad Ali, the famed boxing champion of the 60’s and 70’s is known simply as *“The Greatest.”* When Rickey Henderson broke Lou Brock’s record for stolen bases, he stood on third base at the Oakland Coliseum and proclaimed himself as *“The greatest base-stealer of all time.”* And to some, being listed in the Guinness Book of World records is a sign of significance. It may be baking the largest pizza in the world or growing the longest hair from your ear, but if you’re listed in there, you’re considered “great” at something.

This reminds me of the time a little boy was trying to hit a baseball by himself. He stood there with a bat in one hand and a ball in the other and said, *“I’m the greatest hitter of all time!”* Then he threw the ball in the air, and took a cut at it and missed. Again, he said, *“I’m the greatest hitter of all time!”* and he threw the ball in the air, took a cut at it and miss. He did this a third time, and stood there dejected. But about that time, he raised his

head in triumph and proclaimed, *“I’m the greatest pitcher of all time!”* We’re like that. We want to be great at something.

People in Biblical days were no different. I mentioned the first Lord’s Supper earlier, and during that supper, Luke records that an argument broke out among the disciples as to who was the greatest among them. Think about it! Here were a group of peasants who had grown up around a tiny lake in a remote part of the world, who then had decided to follow a penniless preacher around for three years, and they were arguing about who was the greatest?

Perhaps their argument in reality was not about who was the greatest but more about who was not going to be the least. You know, that is the crux of the matter isn’t it? Most of us know that we’ll never be the greatest as far as the world measures greatness; just don’t let me be the least. I mean, if I can’t be in the top ten, please don’t let me be in the bottom ten.

But serving in the name of Christ will enable us to say no to the way the world defines greatness. Serving in God’s kingdom means not caring or even knowing anything about a pecking order. In fact, when Jesus heard His disciples arguing about who was the greatest among them, He said in **Luke 22:25-26 (NIV)** *“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that...”* He was saying that in His kingdom, there was no pecking order. You all stand on equal ground, and that is what is going to become so attractive to others.

What would happen in our church if we all adopted new definition of greatness, and took on an attitude that says, *“We don’t care about being known as the church with the prettiest building, or the church with the largest budget, or even the friendliest church; we want to be known as a church that serves?”* What if, in our own places of service, every one of us made a commitment that whatever the task is to do, we would say, *“I’ll gladly do it. Whether it’s in my job description or not; whether I get any credit or not; my desire is to glorify God through service.”*

If we took on that attitude, we’d have the same attitude of Christ, for He said in **Matthew 20:28 (NIV)** *“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”*

Second, it would help if we understood the definition of:

## **2. Genuine Servanthood**

When I say genuine servanthood, we need to know the difference between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. In a January 1983 article in Christianity Today entitled, *“The Ministry of the Towel: Practicing Love Through Service,”* Richard Foster makes a distinction between choosing to serve and choosing to be a servant. He wrote: *“When we choose to serve we are still in charge. We decide whom we will serve and when we will serve...But when we choose to be a servant we give up the right to be in charge. There is a great freedom in this... When we choose to be a servant we surrender the right to decide who and when we will serve. We become available and vulnerable.”* (pg. 19).

He is absolutely right! When we choose to serve, we are the master, but when we choose to be a servant, we choose another Master. That is the first step of servanthood – choosing to follow Christ, our Master and Lord.

Along with making the choice to be a servant, comes the realization that in making that choice, we can influence the choices others can make regarding a master. We see this over and over in the Bible. Aaron, Moses’ brother, made a choice to participate in idol worship, and the whole nation followed his leadership. On the other hand, Joshua stood before the people and proclaimed, *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* **Joshua 24:15 (NASB)**, and four times the people responded with *“We will also serve the Lord.”* It matters what we say and what we do in regards to servanthood.

One other aspect of genuine servanthood is the fact that choosing to be a servant means that we will respond in service even when others don’t and even when those who receiving the service are undeserving. Sometimes we can come up with some very compelling excuses as to why we can’t serve.

The night Jesus and His disciples walked into the upper room with dirty feet to celebrate the Passover, I’m sure the disciples had a basket full of excuses as to why they shouldn’t wash feet. *“I had to secure the room,”* one may have said. *“I had to get the food”* said another, *“Well, I had to kill and roast the lamb,”* said another. *“I had to bake the bread,”* said another. *“It’s not my job,”* said another. *“Our feet are not that dirty,”* another may have said. On and on the excuses rolled off their tongues as to why they wouldn’t wash feet. But think about it...who had the most legitimate reason for not washing feet more than Jesus had at that moment? He was

about to be arrested for a crime He wasn't guilty of. He was about to be beaten to a bloody pulp. He was going to die on a cross the next day, and He knew it all. He had the weight of the world on His shoulders. His mind was preoccupied with all these things. Why should He stoop to do what the others would not do? Yet Jesus understood what real servanthood was all about. Jesus exemplified to the nth degree a servant lifestyle as He took off His garments down to a loin cloth, and like a lowly slave, tied a long towel around His waist, took a basin of water, and stooped down before each disciple – even Judas, and washed their feet.

**Conclusion:** Authentic Christian service always has a greater significance than the moment at hand. Whether it's filling a need for a substitute teacher in Sunday School, or helping a fellow worshipper find a seat in an unfamiliar sanctuary, or going to Tanzania to lay blocks for a rustic church building, the need of the moment that is met by one's unselfish and often sacrificial act of servanthood is always a picture and a testimony of how Christ came as a servant to serve mankind. The One who laid aside His garments to wash feet, would also lay aside His life. The One who washed the disciples' feet with water would wash away their sins with His blood. Every act of genuine service points away from and beyond itself to Jesus' ultimate act of service on the cross.

This is why service is not just a list of things to do. And this is also why acting like a servant is different than being a servant. I don't want anyone to do something in this church for me. That would be self-serving and prideful. Instead, our service should be as Paul said in **Colossians 3:23 (NIV)** "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.*"

Would you be one who will take the towel of a servant today? I'm not necessarily talking about washing feet, but rather committing yourself to humbly minister in Christ's name – to seize the moment and find that needy one and meet them at their point of need. Don't wait to be asked, but just make ourselves available to do whatever needs to be done. Let's be known as a church of servants with no big "I's" or little "you's." Let's adopt a servant lifestyle and jump in there and get the job done!