

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Christian Servant: At Home

This morning's talk is the first of a series of four concerning the Christian servant in a variety of contexts. Before we discuss the detail of today's subject, we ought to consider the fact that we who believe that Jesus is Lord should have no option when it comes to service. Having been convinced by the Holy Spirit of the greatness of Christ, we should be His disciples and servants. That said, I know from experience that it is easy to be a 'Sunday only' Christian. To attend a church for the morning service, to sing the hymns, bow in worship, listen to the sermon, then to travel home and forget about the implications of what has been ministered from the Word.

Alternatively, we can make the mistake that I did when I was younger. I was part of a group of young Christians some of whom used to say quite often that we were saved to serve. In other words, that the whole reason for God reaching out to us in grace and revealing something of Himself in Christ was so that we could serve Him. I would then oppose this statement, (and this is the mistake) by saying piously that we were saved to worship. Now that I am older, I think that there is truth in both sayings and that they are not opposing terms.

The fact is that we are saved, if I may use that term, to be a Christian in the New Testament sense. This would include both worship and service. In fact, the apostle Paul told us that service is another expression of worship. Can I refresh your memory with the words that he wrote? I am reading from 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." This brings our labours for the Master onto a higher plane altogether. It is no longer a mistaken competition between worship and service, with the latter losing out amongst those who believe that they are called to higher things. Or service being held as the only practical expression of Christian faith.

I trust that these opening sentences have demonstrated that I believe that we are called to worship and to serve. May I also state that, though I believe some are called to full time Christian service, all believers are called to be full time Christians. This means that all our actions are coloured by the light of Christ. Could I also state that wherever we are and whatever we do, we should do it as unto Him. All that we do should, in some measure, be seen as service to the Lord Jesus. With such a motive, we should be good timekeepers at our secular jobs and loyal to all our friends. We can hardly be guilty of duplicity if we wish to be seen as a servant of the Lord.

My particular concern this morning is the servant of Christ in the home. I must not impinge on the thoughts of others that will deliver a talk in this series. I must therefore, confine my remarks to how Christianity marks the home life of a Christian. Perhaps I can illustrate my first point with a memory from my boyhood years. This was the period just after the Second World War when there wasn't much traffic on the roads where I lived. Sometimes we, (about a dozen children), would meander along the roads and cross the fields to a wood some four miles away. About two miles into our wanderings was a cottage where we would often call for a drink of water. In my mind's eye, it was always a glorious midsummer's day. Invariably a grey haired lady would patiently serve us all with the longed for glass of sparkling, cold water after which we would tramp on with hardly a word of thanks.

Why do I recall this episode from a bye-gone era when our subject is the Christian servant at home? It is because of that lady's attitude to a gang of scruffy children. When I look back, I see kindness and consideration. We might not have been travellers on a major journey but she did show a large measure of patience and hospitality. This brings me to the first point that I wish to emphasise as a characteristic of a Christian servant at home and it is 'hospitality'.

This is one of the aspects of service that the Christian can practise at home. In fact our homes are the most important places where we can show hospitality. Do we, both listener and speaker, use our homes in the service of Christ? The Romans 12:13 states that we should be 'given to hospitality'. This is repeated in the 1 Timothy 3:2.

Far too often our homes are sacrosanct. We can demonstrate our beliefs in the community or at work, but when we arrive home we do not wish to be disturbed. An Englishman's home is his castle is a well-known saying. Do we exclude all but our family from our homes or is there a welcome there for others? As I speak, I can think of a man who is a missionary in a seaport about forty miles from where I live. He visits the mariners on the ships that call into the docks. Not only does he tell them something of the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus but he invites them back to his

home for supper. Some of these men, being far away from their homes and families, really appreciate the simple kindness that is shown by the missionary. Such actions commend the Saviour in a very real and practical way.

If we wish to be a servant of Christ in our day, this is a very simple way of demonstrating that desire. Sometimes we want to do great things for the Lord, a desire that is good, but if we ignore the command to show hospitality we might miss the possibility of those great things. Hebrews 13:2 tells us just this. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." Our hospitality might not include such angelic visitations but it should be sufficient that we are being obedient to our Lord's commands.

An important point that we must bear in mind when we talk about hospitality is to ensure that our homes reflect Christian values. The atmosphere should be one of love and respect. To underscore this, I quote Ephesians. 5:24-25 "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." Can I also add to these Ephesians 6:1-4? "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

I would suggest that such verses help us to understand the type of home that the servant of the Lord should try to create. There are some features in the quoted passage that some find difficulty with, but taken all together and practised in the full glare of the light of Christianity there is no room for the domination of parent against child or husband over wife, or wife over husband. There is a scriptural order that will, if all things are held in balance, produce a loving harmony.

Perhaps I should have emphasised that the Christian servant will have sought a Christian partner and sealed the relationship in marriage. It seems strange that such things should be mentioned, but in our modern world that views relationships in an easygoing way, I think it is needful. It is not that the church is behind the times, rather that we stand for a scriptural order that was established for the benefit of mankind.

The various relationships that marriage brings should also reflect the Christian's desire to serve the Lord. I have already mentioned husbands and wives in the context of the home. I wish to emphasise that these have their scriptural responsibilities, to form a Christian home where the scriptures are read and prayer is made. This home forms a base from where the Gospel can sound out in example, word and deed.

Another aspect of the Christian servant as a homemaker should be the example of the patriarchs. If we look at Genesis 26:23-25 then we shall see this feature quite plainly. "And [Jacob] went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well." From this we can see that Isaac had an altar where his tent was. Though we no longer have an altar in that sense, such a story would point us to the idea of the family altar. Do we who are convinced Christians have a time when we can read the Word together and have a time of family prayer and worship? At its simplest, it might be the regular habit of giving thanks for our food at mealtimes.

May I suggest that this is another real and practical way for the Christian servant to influence the life of the home. If we are the solitary member of our family who has faith in Christ then it is obviously more difficult to establish a so called family altar but we could still make time for our personal prayer and Bible reading which every Christian needs. That in itself would be a testimony to the Saviour.

Still on the subject of homes, I believe that the stewardship of money and the laying aside a portion for the Lord is an act of service for Him. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church with instructions about this. We can read these words in his 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

Our giving of money to the cause of Christ is a realistic index of our love for Him. The Christian servant ought to organise his home and affairs so that there is a sufficient amount of cash available to enhance and resource his home church along with answering, in measure, the call of others who are seeking to labour in the Gospel. If we spend all our money upon our own aggrandisement, we are unprofitable servants. Do such items as the latest fashion in clothes, holidays, CD's, furniture, and entertainment take the lion's share when it comes to budgeting? If they do, then that would be a reflection of the selfishness that is so apparent in the world today. As God has given to us, so we ought also to give to others.

The cross has a sacrificial call to all those who follow the Lord Jesus. He, Himself, tells us this in Luke 9:23. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." This refers just as much to our display of Christianity in the home as it does to our witness in the world at large. Far too often we are concerned with matching the colour of our curtains to the colour of the carpets rather than the cause of Christ. He was concerned with the poor and dispossessed when He was upon the earth. We can hardly claim to be taking up the cross if the wardrobes in our homes are filled with clothes whilst many of our brethren in Africa have nothing at all. I believe that the home of the servant of Christ will reflect the manner of his service for the Lord.

In the Victorian church there was a practice of renting pews to members as a means of raising revenue for the church. It might have served that purpose in an admirable way but it was also socially divisive. The better off could have seats in the warmest parts of the building. It was even possible to attend the service without meeting the poorer members of the congregation. We must be careful that we don't produce a socially divisive expression of Christianity by cocooning ourselves in homes that don't admit a hint of care for the lonely and the outcast.

One of the Lord's parables tells us that we can be rich in this world's goods yet still be poor in those things that really matter. This teaching is in Luke 12. I want to quote verses 20 and 21 where the Lord is finishing off a story about a rich farmer who stored up all his wealth thinking he had sufficient to last many years. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." It will be obvious to our neighbours if our values as a citizen do not reflect our stand as a servant of the Lord.

I wish to dwell for a moment upon the possibility of using our homes as centres of service for Christ. Using our homes as a tool for evangelism didn't begin with *The Alpha Course*. The New Testament gives more than one example of a church meeting in a person's house. During the evangelical revival that brought Methodism into existence, many of the early societies met in cottages. From such places the Word sounded forth until sufficient persons had come to faith in Christ for a place of worship to be erected. Such things can happen today if our attitudes regarding our homes and manner of living do not display a whiff of hypocrisy when compared to the values of Christianity. The power of the living God has not declined just because the world has become more rational and secular. Materialism is one of the enemies of spiritual progress and reality. Sadly, we, as Christian servants, often pay more attention to our possessions than we do to possessing spiritual power.

This would lead me on to another different, yet connected, point about our testimony as Christians in our homes. Perhaps the issue of using our homes as centres for evangelism is not a possibility for some of us. We might live in a small flat or have a young family that fills all our available space and time. We could be the only Christian in an indifferent household that is not ours to organise. I am convinced that just by being a Christian in the midst of a secular neighbourhood is a most important activity. Regularly we move out on the Lord's Day to participate in a Christian meeting. I trust that if there is a prayer meeting or Bible Study midweek that we try to be there. Consequently we demonstrate by our regular and disciplined attendance at a church or assembly that we have faith. This is the dimension that is missing in our society. It is not necessarily the good works and exemplary behaviour that ought to be evident, which mark us off as different. Many non-believers have a morality and care for good causes that match that of Christians, sometimes even outranking our best efforts. What does make us different is that we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the risen, ascended Lord. Faith displayed sincerely and practised in humility should shine like a beacon in secular, materialistic England.

A widely travelled servant of the Lord, whom I greatly respected, once told me that he regularly wrote to people who were undergoing trials. He was not able to visit due to the sheer impossibility of distance and pressure of time. If, however, we could communicate our loving sympathy, thoughts and prayers to those in distress, even if only to remind them of the Father's love, it is a service that can be done for the Lord Jesus. It is, perhaps, easier for us than it was for the minister of the Word with whom I began this paragraph, because we have easy access to the telephone or even e-mail. He used to have to get out his pen and paper, then walk down to the post box. As a word of warning, however, I feel that we must be definitely called and suited to this work, for it is very easy to say something trite and unfeeling.

As a final point, I would suggest an avenue of service that is open to us all, especially those who find it difficult to move about as once they did. It might seem that all service requires us to be full of energy and to be able to get out and about. This is not so, for there is one avenue of service that is supremely important yet is open to all. Even the diffident, the shy and the slow of speech can participate in this, for it is the service of prayer. At any time during the day we can refer to our prayer list to remember an individual or organisation at the throne of grace. Who can say what the fruit of such service will be? Far too often we wish to be in a line of service that is in the public eye in order to be noticed. If this is our motive, then we shall receive our reward as the Lord has said. Sadly, it will be the praise of men and not of the Master. Serving the Lord Jesus in the home might have a hidden character, but He will see and appreciate its full cost.

During the dark days of the Second World War, it was difficult to buy sufficient clothes due to the rationing scheme then in force. I must say that such scarcity didn't bother me for I was only young and clothes were the last item on my agenda. For my sister it was a different matter, and to try to alleviate the problem of new clothes, my mother would occasionally change the appearance a dress or blouse by dyeing them a different colour. You could always tell when she had done this because her hands were coloured with the dye.

I pray that our service for the Lord will start in the home and that our hands will be coloured by little acts or great achievements, all done for Him and in His glorious Name.

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