

## **Spring Training - part 7**

### **Serve**

*Mark 2:1-12; Daniel 7:13-14*

#### **Saved to serve.**

- *Mark 10:45; John 20:21-23*

#### **Serve to share.**

- *Matthew 5:16*

#### **Share to save.**

- *Ephesians 5:15-17; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Corinthians 9:22-23;  
Romans 10:13-15*

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## Spring Training: Service

When I was in grade school and junior high, I would watch major league baseball on TV and I would keep an official score while I watched the game. In baseball there is an official way to keep score using a scorebook. It's a fairly complicated system but if you do it right, you have a record of every single strike, ball, out, every throw and where it went, and how every player did when he was up to bat and on the bases. The way it works is, there are numbers that represent the fielders that you use to record what they did. For instance, if the shortstop threw a batter out at first base for the second out in the inning, on the line that represents the batter in that particular inning, you would write down 6-3 (six is the shortstop, 3 is the first base man), 6-3 and then you'd write a "2" and circle it, meaning the second out. If a batter got a hit, you'd draw a little line to show where the ball went and then a line to show what base he made it to. Then there are letters that represent different things that can happen, like if a guy struck out, you'd write a big "K" in that box. If he struck out but didn't swing, you'd write a backwards "K". If he hit a fly ball that was caught by the center fielder for an out, you'd write F8 and circle the number of the out for that inning. "F" for "fly out" and "8" for the position number, center field. There are codes for every conceivable thing that can happen. One of those is the letters "SAC." Here's what it means: anytime a player willingly allows himself to get out in order to advance the other runners around the bases or to score, it is called a (*anybody know?*) A "sacrifice." It means there is greater gain for a player to give up himself for the sake of another player and the rest of the team. (*repeat*)

That, my friends, is an excellent metaphor for the practice of the Christian life that is called "service." A fundamental part of being a Christian is living a life of service to others. And it's not always easy – it is a sacrifice: to give up yourself for the sake of someone else and for the sake of the Kingdom of God. I'll define it again: service is the sacrifice of yourself for the sake of someone else and for the sake of the Kingdom of God. In baseball, it's for another player and the rest of the team. For the Christian, it's for someone else and for the Kingdom. (I need to give credit to Pastor Casey for coming up with this baseball metaphor for service, because it's a good one.) We are talking about the sacrifice of serving others.

Last week we talked about the importance of what is called "witnessing" – that each of us are to introduce people to Jesus Christ and encourage as many people as possible to join us on our journey. This is God's priority task for every Christian on the planet – and he gives us his Holy Spirit for our growth in holiness so we can be the power and presence of God in this world as we love others and share the Gospel – the Good News of God's love – in ways that others can understand.

If you remember, I said that we witness to others about Jesus through two things; what are they? Actions and words. When we talked about actions, I hinted that we'd be looking at that some more today. So today I want us to see that the fundamental lifestyle of service is a very key part of being a witness by our actions.

We're going to see *that* in a story in the Bible about the lengths that some men went to in order to help their crippled friend get to Jesus. We can read about it in three of the four gospels, but for today we'll read it from Mark's gospel. Since the Word of God is our priority, and since we work very hard to ensure that we preach solely from God's Word, would you honor God's Word by standing with me as I read it to us? Thank you:

"When Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 'Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take your mat and walk"? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.' So he said to the man, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.' He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12, niv)

May God bless and apply and empower the reading and preaching of His Word to our hearts. Thanks for standing – you can have a seat, please.

This is a powerful story from Scripture of love, friendship, forgiveness, healing, and correction, and it all starts with some guys loving and serving – making a sacrifice – for their crippled friend. Let's look at this.

The passage tells us that Jesus had come "home" – most likely it means that after the events in chapter one, he came back to Peter's house, where he had been staying. It was made up of several small, roofed rooms surrounding a courtyard. In this story, Jesus was teaching from within one of these rooms, and the crowds were pressed in to all the spaces of the house inside and outside, straining to hear Jesus speak. No one was willing to make room for this crippled man and his friends.

The Bible is clear that Jesus was telling them “the Word” – the “logos” or the Gospel, the Good News of God’s love for them and that God’s Kingdom had arrived in himself – in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

The man on the mat was an adult – because of the way he is described and because it took four men to carry him. We know the man was paralyzed, but we don’t know why or for how long. Remember that these were small towns and people didn’t travel much, so probably everyone knew the man and his condition.

It could not have been easy to carry this guy up to the roof, but the friends were able to get access to the roof by a wooden ladder or a narrow outside staircase. Then they figured out which room Jesus was in, and they dug through the roof. Most houses at that time and in that area “had flat roofs made of a mixture of clay and brush, reinforced by wooden beams.”<sup>2</sup> It wouldn’t have been too difficult to cut through, but there’s no way they could have done it without everyone underneath hearing it and seeing all the dust and materials falling in on them. Imagine you are in that scene – Jesus is teaching, then you hear some noise up on the roof, then dust starts to fall on Jesus and you and the crowd, then suddenly a shot of hot middle-eastern sunshine breaks through the roof, the shafts of light filled with dust and falling debris. I imagine that once the hole started, the friends stopped worrying about the disruption and really started getting into it, quickly tearing open the hole in the roof. Inside the room, through the cloud of debris you see a man on a mat, with ropes in the corners being clumsily lowered right in front of Jesus – there are moments that the man might fall out!

The faces of people in the crowd probably showed a mixture of shock and irritation at the interruption. But what do you think the look on Jesus’ face was like? Imagine it...Do you think he was frustrated with the intrusion of his teaching? Do you think Jesus was irritated by being covered in dust as it filled his eyes like sandpaper? I think, knowing Jesus, he probably broke into a big, broad smile, and then was ready to catch the guy if he fell out, but waited for the man to be finished being lowered to the floor in front of him. I think Jesus also knew who was in the crowd, and that he was being given more than just an opportunity to heal this guy. Jesus knew that there were strict legalistic religious people in the crowd watching him carefully, and this was an opportunity to demonstrate what the Kingdom of God is really all about – not about following rules, but being in a loving relationship with God.

The Scripture says that Jesus understood the faith of the men lowering down their crippled friend (it doesn’t say anything about the faith of the crippled man), and so Jesus takes action. We can only assume that the men brought their friend to Jesus because they had heard about his ability to heal to people. They had hoped that finally their friend could be healed, and they weren’t going to let a crowd of legalists keep them from getting their friend to Jesus. They were determined.

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<sup>1</sup> Kent Brower, *Mark: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, “New Beacon Bible Commentary” (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012) pg 83

<sup>2</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mk 2:4.

But interestingly, instead of healing the man, Jesus announced, “Your sins are forgiven.” Now, that seems like a strange thing, doesn’t it? The friends brought the man to be healed from his paralysis, and Jesus forgave the man of his sins.

There are several things going on here. One, there was a common perception in that culture, that if a person was sick, they must have sinned. We know that isn’t correct, at least not all the time. *Some sins do* result in mental, physical, or psychosomatic illnesses. But not all sins do. And not all physical illnesses are the result of sin. But *they* didn’t think of it that way; they thought *all* physical illnesses were the result of a person’s sin. Here’s the cool thing: Jesus didn’t go into a big debate about the theology of illness and sin; he was willing to deal with them at their level of understanding. Jesus got straight to the heart of the matter – the condition of the man’s soul. So he forgave his sins.

It’s also interesting that Jesus forgave the man, not because of the man’s faith but *due to the faith of his friends*. There’s nothing in the passage that indicates that the man ever asked for forgiveness or even healing; in fact he doesn’t even say a word in the story. The man didn’t ask for forgiveness even though he needed it. But Jesus knew the man’s heart and his need, and so Jesus gave forgiveness, prompted by what his friends were doing for him. That tells you that *what we do in service to others has a direct result, a direct blessing, on their spiritual lives. (repeat)* Remember that.

But Jesus also saw this as an opportunity to set some things straight. Remember, there were religious leaders, or “scribes” in the crowd. They represented the religious scholars; they were the theologians who thought they had God all figured out, and they knew the rules – they *wrote* many of them!

So when Jesus forgave the man’s sins, the scribes blew a gasket. They knew the Old Testament well enough to know that only God has the authority to forgive sins. Not only that, their rules stated that God would not forgive sins unless someone had gone through the prescribed rituals of sacrifice and cleansing. They were angry because, for Jesus to brazenly forgive the man’s sins was breaking the religious rules and amounted to him calling himself God. *Which is exactly why Jesus forgave the man’s sins:* he was declaring that he was not only sent from God, he was God’s Son, the Messiah, the Christ. God. Jesus is greater than any religion.

Then we are told that Jesus knew what the scribes were thinking. Jesus had discernment into the hearts of people. So he went straight to the heart of the crippled man’s need, and at the same time he went straight to the heart of the Scribe’s problems.

But just saying that the man’s sins were forgiven didn’t really prove anything – anyone could make that claim, but how could you prove it? Jesus was ready to actually prove his authority – he said, “What’s easier to do – to claim the man’s sins are forgiven, or to actually heal him physically? To prove that I can do the first, I’m going to do the second.” So Jesus healed him, too.

Just before that, though, Jesus referred to himself by an interesting title – did you see what he called himself? He called himself, “the Son of Man.” That’s a strange term if

you are not familiar with its history, but I can promise you that the people crowded into that house knew exactly what Jesus meant. The term literally means, “Human One.” But it is used in the Old Testament book of Daniel to describe the Messiah – the Sent One of God. This is what Daniel described in his prophetic vision:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a *son of man*, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14, niv, *italics added*)

The “Son of Man” that Daniel described is clearly the authority of God – he is on the clouds of heaven – which was a description of God’s presence, he comes in and out of God’s presence. He has authority, glory, and sovereignty, and will be worshipped by the entire world. He is a King whose kingdom is eternal. So for Jesus to call himself “Son of Man” left no doubt in anyone’s minds that day – Jesus was declaring himself to be the Son of God, and he proved it by forgiving sins *and* healing the crippled man. Seven hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah said that one key proof of the Messiah would be that he would restore sight to the blind and heal the crippled so that they would walk and leap – **Isaiah 35:5-6**.

So now you can understand that it is no exaggeration that everyone was amazed, praised God, and said, “We’ve never seen anything like this!” Because as soon as Jesus told the crippled man, “Pick up your mat and go home,” the man did exactly that – right in front of everybody!

So let me just share with you a few quick applications about how important service is when it comes to this fundamental of the Christian life. Living a life of service is essential. Last week we talked about the importance of inviting as many people as we can to join us on this journey; today we are seeing that we not only invite – *there are some people we need to carry into Jesus’ presence through our loving actions of serving those in need. (repeat)*

The first application we need to see is that we are...

### **Saved to serve.**

Like those friends, we know what Jesus is capable of doing; so we need to carry others who are in need to Jesus so that he can heal them.

Service to others is about doing Christ’s work in this world until Jesus comes back. Jesus was very clear what he had come to do. He told the disciples:

“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45, niv)

He came to serve, and to expend his life in the service of others. And Jesus saves *us* to carry out *his* work. He told his disciples, and he tells us:

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’”  
(John 20:21-23, niv)

The Father sent the Son to serve, and as the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends us. We are saved and sent to serve, just like Jesus. Serving is fundamental to the Christian walk.

So you might ask, what is serving? At it’s most simple, *serving is sharing what I have with someone else who needs it*. If there is a need, and I have a means to meet it, I do what I can for that person in need. And it’s not just money or material goods – it might be time, or attention, or encouragement, or friendship, or teaching a child to read, or assisting a teacher who teaches a child to read. For sure it will always include praying. We all have something to give, in some way. Do we serve only to meet their physical, social, or emotional needs? Yes. We serve simply because we are Christians, and that is what Jesus does. Serving has value for its own sake; we serve for the sake of serving. But we also know that when we serve it gives the Holy Spirit room to work...

**We serve to *share*.**

While serving others has value in its own right, we also serve because we want to show and share this Good News about Jesus with them. Meeting needs is the best way to show and to share the Good News of God’s love to people. Jesus said:

“Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.” (Matthew 5:16, nlt)

I like how the Message Bible translates that verse:

“Be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16, tmt)

When we love and serve people, they have the opportunity to see the One who is in us and then open their lives to Him.

Those friends served their crippled friend, and in the process, they brought him into the presence of Jesus. We have the same opportunity to do so in our everyday lives every time we love and serve someone, we are bringing them into the presence of Jesus because Jesus is in us!

Why do you think we do what we do as a church? We serve the needs of the families at Wide Hollow and Mountainview elementary schools because by doing so we are bringing the presence of Jesus to them. Please check out the display to see how you can help with Backpack to School. At Trunk or Treat, we give children a safe, evil-free environment to celebrate Halloween. Lord knows they need a safe place to have sanctified fun! We do it because when those hundreds of guests come through, every single one of us that they meet is 100 plus opportunities for them to be in the presence of Jesus. We do Breakfast with Santa for the same reason. We do Upward

Soccer for the same reason. It's the same reason we meet kids' needs at Homework Club. As junior high and high school students, it means you are kind and don't gossip and you serve other students or neighbors or coworkers or those lonely, bullied kids at school, *you* are bringing them into the presence of Jesus through you.

You have the presence of Jesus in you because you are filled with the Holy Spirit. And when you serve, they will eventually recognize their need for their sins to be forgiven. I heard from someone in our church who was at a local store and struck up a conversation with an employee at that store – a young woman. The conversation turned to our church – West Valley Church. This unchurched woman said, "I just love your church and all that you do for our community! We love coming to Trunk or Treat! It is such a fun, safe time for my little ones. They aren't old enough yet to join Upward Soccer, but as soon as they are, I will sign them up." Because of our *service*, this young mom loves our church, and she hadn't even attended church! I don't know if she has attended worship yet, but she knows all about us and feels loved by us. Soon her children will be at Upward Soccer where they will hear about Jesus and have an opportunity to accept him. She will learn about Homework Club, and Caravan, youth group, small groups, and worship – all where she will encounter God.

We are saved to serve, and we serve to share Christ with them.

Finally, we...

### **Share to save.**

We are so amazed and overwhelmed by the love of Christ that we want others to know Him too. So we will invite others to join us, and we will serve others to bring his presence to them, because we want them to see in us how great Jesus is. Our deepest desire is that others would know how much God loves them and they'd respond to his saving forgiveness and love. The Bible reminds us:

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Ephesians 5:15-17, niv)

The Lord's will is that no one misses the opportunity to be saved:

"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent." (2 Peter 3:9, nlt)

God wants *everyone* to be saved.

This is what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said:

"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel..." (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, niv)

God sends us to meet needs and bring people into Jesus' presence, so as they see him in us, they will respond to him and realize they need their sins forgiven and be



healed, and will ask us about him so we can share the Good News with them, and they might respond and be saved. I shared this verse last week, but I want to share it again:

“Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them unless someone sends him? That is what the Scriptures are talking about when they say, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace with God and bring glad tidings of good things.” In other words, how welcome are those who come preaching God’s Good News! (Romans 10:13-15, tlb)

We are **saved to serve**, and we **serve to share**, and we **share to save**.

I remember one young mom whose marriage was about to end in divorce. Both she and her husband were completely unchurched – their life and their language showed it. She had four children – all under the age of two! She had two sets of twins. They had been premature, so they were often sick in the hospital with severe respiratory issues – not to mention the incredible need for formula, food, and diapers! So a small group in our church loved her family, cleaned her house, brought meals, diapers, and provided childcare relief. Soon she attended that small group. Soon she invited her husband to join her. He went once, reluctant to go back because he said, “No one is that happy!” Soon she accepted Jesus, and soon after her husband did too. They saw Jesus in the Church and became saved.

People, folks today did not grow up the way many of you did. Many of you grew up hearing about the church or even being raised in it, but many young people today have either left the church because they were hurt by someone, or many people know nothing about the church.

Listen: people today can only be *loved* into the kingdom. Back in the day, it used to be that you would debate and reason about Christianity with someone, and if they accepted Jesus, *then* they could belong to the church; first people believed, then they would belong. They did not belong to the church until they believed. But today is different. Today, people need to belong *before* they will believe. People need to know they are loved and accepted – served – and *then* they will believe. People are loved into the Kingdom. Belonging leads to believing.

The Christian way is back to the same simple style of Jesus: saved to serve, serve to share, share to save. It is fundamental that we carry those who are in need, until *they* are in the presence of Jesus and *their* sins can be forgiven and be healed.

Maybe you are here, and you need the healing that Jesus can bring you....

*Prayer*

So what do we do with a message like this? We find practical ways to serve others. Your church is one of the easiest ways to serve! There are so many ways you can get

involved and serve others. I've mentioned some of them. Our children's ministry really needs people to help; don't be intimidated; you don't have to teach. You can serve behind the scenes too. Our youth group is really growing, and we need adult volunteers. You could serve in worship ministries – even if you don't sing, there are places to help with the tech team. You can serve by helping us welcome our guests each Sunday by being a greeter or an usher. You can serve by being a small group leader. You can serve by volunteering with our facility in cleaning or fixing the building and grounds, or in our church office. You can serve by bringing things in for Backpack to School, or by helping sort supplies. You can serve by helping with meals for others through our Congregational Care Ministry Team. I know I'm leaving things out. There are so many ways to serve that are ready-made for you.

In your personal life, you can serve your neighbors by praying for them, taking food to them, mowing their yard, or raking leaves.

There are other ways to serve in the community: volunteering at the Union Gospel Mission, at Love INC, at Habitat for Humanity, at your local school...Pray about where God would like you to serve. I promise you he will direct you, because this is fundamental to the Christian life.

### *Benediction*

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11, niv)