

Servants of All

by Elisabeth Elliot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeing Christ in oneself, one's husband, and the relationship between husband and wife as a mystery of Christ in the church.

Duration: 44:45

Scripture: Genesis 12:1, Genesis 12:4, Matthew 25:40-42, Matthew 25:44-45

Topics: "Servanthood"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of serving others and getting rid of self-pity. He references Isaiah 58:10, which states that if one pours themselves out for the hungry, the Lord will satisfy their soul. The speaker encourages listeners to become servants of Jesus Christ by putting aside their own agendas and saying yes to their responsibilities, such as their spouse and children. He also highlights the passage in Matthew 25:40, where Jesus teaches that whatever is done for the least of his brothers is done for him. The sermon concludes with the message to see Christ in oneself and in one's spouse.

Transcript

Servants of all, let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you for being willing to be served by us. Lord, we need your cleansing, we need your Holy Spirit to work in us and through us.

We are not naturally servant-minded, but we pray, Father, that day by day you will work in us to will and to do of your good pleasure. Help us to relinquish our personal agenda and to lay ourselves totally at your orders, as Mary did. Speak to us this morning, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Jeremy Taylor, who lived back in the 17th century, wrote, Lord, do thou turn me all into love and all my love into obedience. I said yesterday that the only proof of love is obedience.

Lord, do thou turn me all into love and all my love into obedience. And let my obedience be without interruption. Let my obedience be without interruption.

People have asked me what was the first thing that attracted me to Lars Grenn. Well, God knows that I was not attracted to Lars in the sense of imagining him as a future husband. He was simply my lodger in my house, along with the man who became my son-in-law.

But when the Lord began to speak to me, even though my heart was completely closed to the possibility of a third marriage, I began to watch this man with a different attitude, I think. And I realized that Lars is a

man with a servant heart. And I think that all of you would recognize that in his willingness to come along with me, even though he's the one that's sitting down there in the front and I'm on the platform.

His willingness to listen to these stories of Jim Elliott and Ad Leitch without feeling upset and upstaged. And he's the sort of man who is constantly looking to see what somebody else needs. And I'm grateful for the example that he sets.

I hope that I've learned some things from him. He grew up in Norway with very godly grandparents. And he has told me some of the things that he learned from that wonderful grandfather.

We all need models, don't we? Role models, we call them nowadays. But just if we stop to think, think back in your life, who were the people who pointed you to Jesus Christ? Who were the people whose attitude of mind and style of life drew you to him? Probably they are, without exception, people who had servant hearts. Mary gave herself away.

She said, behold, the handmaiden of the Lord, let it happen as you say, be it unto me according to thy word. And servanthood always means self-denial and self-giving and self-abandonment and relinquishment of all of our rights. Point number one, learn to see Christ in yourself.

Now, that's a very difficult thing for most of us anyway, I think. Christ liveth in me, Paul said, and that is a staggering statement, isn't it? Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, deigned to be born of a virgin named Mary. But it doesn't end there.

He deigns to live in each one of us. Such different personalities, such different gifts, such different backgrounds, such different outlooks on life. And yet it is Christ himself who lives in us.

We need to learn to recognize that holy presence that should shape our lives and shape our thinking. In the little book that I read a little bit from the other day, it says if Christ is formed in our lives, it means that he will suffer in us, or more truly, we will suffer in him. He was made man.

Mary saw at once what was meant in her case. Supernaturally, he was made herself. Jesus Christ was formed in the flesh, in the body of this woman, Mary.

And he became Mary, in a sense. He was made herself. And if he is made man in you, he will be made you.

Now, these are very difficult concepts, but the more I read them, the more I see the truth. He is in me, and therefore he is willing to live in me. He is willing to go where I go.

He is willing to see what I see, to think what I think. It is extremely difficult to lay hold of this fact. It is very hard not to think of a kind of mystical Christ.

Just beside us, or just in front of us, or just behind us, suffering with infinite patience and joy. Being obedient, humble, persevering, and fulfilling his father's will. It is really difficult to realize that if he is formed in my life, I am not beside him, but in him.

And what he asks of me is to realize that it is actually in what I do that he wants to act and suffer. Now, you're probably already lost. Stick with me.

For example, this author says, if you are conscripted, it is Christ who is saying goodbye and leaving his home. Christ who is marching on the endless route march. The blisters on the feet of the new recruit are bleeding on the feet of Christ.

Again, if you are an office worker and the person over you is trying, meaning difficult to get along with, perhaps rather limited in intelligence or so that you imagine you have some kind of right to be irritable. Well, it is not you at all that must be obedient and humble and gracious. It is Christ.

Christ who said to the weak and timid civil servant Pontius Pilate, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Have you stopped to think about the fact that Pilate was given power by the Heavenly Father to dispose of Jesus in any way he wished. Now, there's something for meditation the rest of your life.

The mystery of the sovereign will of God. You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above, Jesus said. It really needs to be practiced to be understood.

We need to say to ourselves a thousand times a day, Christ in me. Christ wants to do this in me. Christ wants to suffer this in me.

And we will come to realize that there is one tremendous answer to the question which is reiterated to the point of utter weariness. Why should I, if we're having a servant heart, every now and then that needling little thought is going to enter our minds. Why should I, why do I always have to be the one who serves? How about her? She never does anything.

But there's another question that comes straight out of scripture. Ought not Christ to suffer these things and so enter into his glory? In other words, the Bible is telling us again and again in many different ways, Christ had to suffer. It was ordained that he suffer.

And if we are going to be his followers and his servants, it is ordained that we suffer. And God knows exactly the measure of suffering that each of us needs. Learn to see Christ in your own being, in your life.

I trust that you'll be pondering these things for a long time. Now, the second thing, and perhaps this brings it down to earth in a way that point one might not have done because it's so difficult. But this second one, I think you're going to understand is a crucial lesson for all of us who are married.

Point two, see Christ in your husband. Matthew 25, 40 is the crucial passage here. Jesus is speaking to his disciples.

And he says, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. The king will reply, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

And then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you who are cursed into the eternal fire. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.

I was a stranger and you did not invite me in. I needed clothes and you did not clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.

We've already heard this passage read this morning, haven't we? And they will also answer, Lord, when did we see you hungry? This was a staggering thought. When did we see you thirsty or a stranger needing

clothes? And in verse 45, he says, I tell you the truth. Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.

Now, here's perhaps one of the most difficult, but also the most transforming truths for a wife to grasp. She lives with a fallible human being. And if you didn't think he was fallible before you married him, it doesn't take very long to find that out, does it? And God has ordained that we are supposed to live with this man 365 days a year.

And get along graciously and happily. And don't you ever forget that your husband married a sinner. I tell women, remember, when you get married, you're going to marry a sinner.

There isn't anything else to marry. But don't forget what he's stuck with. Yet the Bible gives us clear instructions for both the husband and the wife.

And I think you know what those instructions are. Ephesians 5 is the crucial passage. It says, wives submit to your husbands.

Why? Because they're so much smarter than you are. They're better looking than you are. They're taller than you are.

They're bigger than you are. They're stronger than you are. And they're never wrong.

Is that what it says? It says, wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Who is never wrong and never mistaken. And never unkind.

I am to submit to my husband as though he were Jesus Christ. Now that's a tough assignment. Probably the toughest of all assignments for us females.

But I think the men have a tougher assignment. What does it say in that passage that a man is supposed to do? A husband is to love his wife because she's always so sweet. And so lovable.

Is that what it says? No, it doesn't say that at all. It just says, husbands love your wives. That is a command.

An unequivocal command. Love your wives how? As Christ loved the church. If every husband were to examine himself on his knees every single morning and ask himself if he is loving his wife as Christ loved the church there would be some different kinds of marriages, wouldn't there? If both of us, both the husband and the wife took seriously and honestly and earnestly before God these crystal clear commands there wouldn't be any marital problems whatsoever.

When I have an opportunity to talk to a couple who are planning to get married I point out two simple things which will keep them from ever even thinking about a divorce. And one is the intention of unity and the other is concern for the good of the other person. Concern for the good of the other.

The husband is to love his wife as he loves himself. That's also in the Bible. Now God is pointing his finger on a human characteristic which is not sinful to begin with.

We were made to love ourselves in the sense that we have a responsibility to take care of this body. We are stewards. We are servants of God.

Not in the sense of learning to love ourselves in order to love our neighbor. Jesus when he said love your neighbor as yourself was simply pointing out a human trait which is very obvious. We do love ourselves.

If somebody steps on your foot whose foot is it that they've stepped on? It's yourself and you instantly react in anger because we are very protective of ourselves. But the husband is to love his wife beginning with the minimum. How do you love yourself? Give your wife the same kind of a break is the idea.

And the wife is to reverence her husband. And we make all kinds of excuses about that because we don't think he really deserves to be revered. Respect maybe yes but the word is the same.

So let's remember that what is impossible with men and women is possible with God. And he has never issued a command which he will not enable us to obey. God has never issued a command which he will not enable us to obey.

So let's not be telling God what we can't do. Anything God tells us to do we can do in the strength of the Lord. Now because I receive so many more letters from wives than from husbands I'm going to leave the but what about him to God.

And I'm going to try to address the difficulties which we wives face. What is a wife to do if her husband is being disobedient in any way to what God says. I'm very grateful for the shining testimonies of a number of women who have written to me and given me their stories of transformed marriages.

It is amazing how many stories like that I have received in my mail which wonderfully counterbalance the tragic stories that come in every pile of mail. Their marriages once seemingly impossible or at least difficult have been totally changed because they have begun to obey to trust and obey those simple words. Remember the three conditions of discipleship? Jesus said if you want to be my disciple you must give up your right to yourself and there is no more fruitful field in which to practice that principle than in marriage.

Give up your right to yourself. Once you get married once you walk down that aisle and pronounce those awesome vows in the presence of God and witnesses you have somebody else's name you have no more privacy you have no more right to unilateral decisions you very likely have to leave your home and your family and your geography and perhaps go overseas there are all kinds of ways in which you do not any longer have the same kind of freedom that you had before because you are now not one but two and you are not the head it's our husbands who are assigned headship.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about this matter of the husband is the head of the wife it doesn't say the husband ought to try to be it doesn't say the husband should work on becoming it doesn't say the wife should confer upon her husband the honor of being her head what does it say? the husband is the head of the wife he can like it or he can lump it but he is going to have to answer to God about what he does with that command you and I are not responsible for that we are responsible to be subordinate any man in the military knows what subordination means any man or woman in the military there is no argument about that you know I have women constantly asking me but tell me what does submission really mean well the only reason they ask that question is because they know

exactly what it means and they don't like it there has never been one man in the whole world that has ever come to me and said what does submission mean every man knows what it means, we all know what it means to obey the policeman, we know what it means to obey the laws, the civil laws the laws of our country we know perfectly well that there are people to whom we must submit now that the private doesn't

submit to the corporal or the sergeant or the general because that corporal, sergeant or general is a better person he submits because he has been assigned an office it is an assignment it is a solemn responsibility and my husband has been assigned an office not by me but by God so those three conditions of discipleship become very meaningful very real to me in my marriage give up your

right to yourself and take up the cross which means accepting suffering in whatever tiny little form or huge form it may appear giving up my right to myself involves suffering because there are things I want that I'm not going to have and there are things that irritate me that I am not allowed to be irritated by take up the cross and follow, just put one foot in front of the other now once having made up our minds to be disciples we can then study God's specific teaching on marriage if we decided to take up those three conditions the husband represents Christ as Christ is head of the church you see there is a very great mystery involved in the relationship between husband and wife it's not just one man and one woman falling in love and thinking well wouldn't it be kind of neat to live

together for the rest of our lives it is a deep unfathomable mystery because the husband represents Christ and the wife represents the bride I've been in some panels and I've been on TV with debates on this whole subject of feminism and femininity and to me there is a great gulf fixed between femininity and feminism and no feminist ever uses the word feminine but you know not once even in churches where I've been asked to be on a panel not once has anybody raised this mysterious point which is to me the most crucial and fundamental point which we must understand which is that we represent a mystery of Christ in the church as the church submits to Christ it says in Ephesians 5 24 so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything in everything subordination is not inferiority it

is divine drawn from the very nature of God the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ Christ witnesses to the Father and in obedience to his Father he was willing to be made a little lower than the angels that was when he became man you and I are made a little lower than the angels we have a hierarchy in heaven beginning with God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit cherubim seraphim archangels angels and a little lower than the angels us human beings and Jesus took that position what a mystery P.T.

Forsyth said without the spirit of subordination there is no true piety no manly nobility and no womanly charm wonderful isn't it without the spirit of subordination there is no true piety no manly nobility and no womanly charm now such a concept is vehemently opposed by the world today but if we insist on equality we refuse the divine order if we insist on equality now one of my friends cheered me greatly by telling me her own testimony she wanted above all she said to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings that's from Philippians 3 10 and 11 and she offered this suggestion when your husband comes home say to yourself Christ returns practice obedience that is Jesus Christ whom you are receiving in as much as you've done it for one of the least

of these my brothers you have done it for me he says who's walking in that door who sits down in that chair in the living room that is Jesus Christ and so she says practice readiness when he is hungry or thirsty give it to him as if he were Christ remembering that it is Christ he represents what a privilege we have to minister to him just as the women of the new testament did if he is disobedient to the word in any way don't get headaches trying to be quiet listen to this now put an imaginary blanket over his face and to cover a multitude of sins and don't bring them to mind now somebody sent me a tape people send me tapes all the time and most of them have to go into a box and be given away because I don't have time to listen to tapes for some reason obviously I know the reason now but

the Holy Spirit of God somehow or other forced me to put that tape into the little recorder that I have in my kitchen so I can listen while I'm cooking sometimes it was a terrible tape from the standpoint of technology I could hear babies crying and there was scratching and all kinds of awful noise I really had to practically stop cooking and go and listen with my ear to the machine to hear what this man was saying but I was absolutely amazed with the picture that he drew this was a man who had the temerity to talk about submission to husbands there aren't very many preachers that want to get anywhere near that subject but he painted this picture he says your husband has a favorite chair in the living room you know where to expect to find him but you walk into that living room one day and

Jesus Christ is sitting in that chair what would you do? you would say it's the Lord what can I do for you Jesus? and Jesus says well I'd like to have a cup of tea and you go out in the kitchen and you get out to your most beautiful china and you fix the loveliest tray with a linen napkin and you boil that tea kettle and you put the tea in and you bring this and present it to him in the most beautiful way and then Jesus says is supper ready? you say well almost and he said would you mind holding it for an hour I have to go down the street to speak to somebody what would your response to that be? no problem at all this is Jesus but if it's that man whose socks you wash and in whose bed you sleep it's a whole different ball game isn't it now this man ended up by saying this do we husbands

deserve to be treated like that of course not and he said we know it but he said I want to ask you ladies do you think we'd be worse if you did treat us like that do you really think we'd be worse he said I don't think so I really don't think so learn to see Christ in your husband Mary's attitude was total trust we say well it isn't working this reverence thing this profound respect mingled with love and awe that which is impossible with men is possible with God and I do not believe that there would be any thought whatsoever of breaking up a marriage if even one of the party if not two if even perhaps one of them determined to do things God's way point three see Christ himself in your singleness and now I'm speaking to you singles I get many letters from women who are quite angry with God

God has given a husband to everybody else they know except them what is it with me what's wrong with me why doesn't God love me well there are a whole lot of answers to that that aren't any of our business most things you know are none of our business and the older I get the more I realize very few things are my business but I am a busy body and I'm a big mouth and the Lord is constantly telling me shut up and calm down and stick to what I've given you to do that is not your business I had the privilege many many years ago of sitting down on a sofa with Gladys Aylward that amazing tiny little woman from China she was a missionary to China she was a London parlor maid she had no education at all but she believed that God had called her to China and I heard her speak to a huge audience

there was no sound system in those days she was about 4 feet 11 she was as thin as a toothpick she wore a straight Chinese gown with a mandarin collar and she had her thin grey hair screwed up in the top of her head and when I saw her sitting there on the platform I thought we're never going to be able to hear her in this enormous auditorium and they put a huge box behind the pulpit so that she could be seen over the podium well I needn't have opened I needn't have worried at all because the minute she stood up she said I should like to read just one verse and Jehovah God said to Abram get out and Abram got out and one day in a little flat in London Jehovah God spoke to a London parlour maid and he said get out and I said where do you want me to go Lord and he said to China well I didn't

know where China was she said I better get a map so I bought a map and I spread it out on the table and I made up my mind that I would go to China well she talked for two and a half hours it seemed like twenty

minutes we were all completely mesmerized but she and I had a chance a little bit later to sit down on a sofa and talk together about what it's like to be single on the mission field I had become a widow by the time I met her Gladys told me that she spent six years in China single and perfectly happy until a couple from England came out to work quite near where she was and she saw that this was something wonderful that they had she had never thought about marriage but here was a couple that exhibited to her something so beautiful that she wished she had the same thing she was a no

nonsense kind of a woman and so she prayed very specifically Lord send me a husband and send him right out here to where I am and have him propose but then she said to me she leaned toward me with her little bony finger she said Elizabeth I believe God answers prayer he called him but he never came and if you've ever seen the movie the end of the sixth happiness it's about Gladys Aylward or if you've read her book called the small woman it's about Gladys Aylward she was in China for many years and she was most well known because she shepherded 100 Chinese children across the mountains during the war all by herself incredible woman she could never have done what she did if she had had a husband it was another assignment the same thing was true of Amy Carmichael Amy Carmichael could never

establish the work in the Donor World Fellowship of South India if she had had a family she had a family of 700 children and she was the mother you don't need to know all that's behind God's having you single on this particular day that is not your business singleness is God's assignment for you right now today tomorrow is not your business yesterday is gone there's not a thing you could do about that you don't know what tomorrow holds but you do know who holds tomorrow don't you and so in God's inscrutable wisdom he has given to most of us husbands he has given to some of us three husbands he has given to a lot of you no husband will you say yes Lord as Mary did behold the handmaiden of the Lord let it happen as you say be it unto me according to thy word not mine when I have a chance to

speak to singles groups and we just were in Texas not long ago where we spoke to about 2,000 singles in one church can you imagine 2,000 single people in one church all these beautifully dressed women and all these handsome and well dressed men and in Texas there's nobody that can beat the way they dress there and I just what I wanted to do was line up all the men on one side of the room line up all the women on the other side of the room have them count off 1, 2, 1, 2 and just say to the guys get off your duff and get married and start putting away childish things your bungee jumping and your hang gliding and your scuba diving and get serious but I can't make them do that and I cannot make those women give up their bitterness all I can do is say do you really trust and obey will you

stick to the job God has given you to do this day do you consider singleness a gift or a problem and of course if they're honest most of them would say it's a problem it's a very big problem and we've got men in their 30s and 40s who have hardly even thought about the fact of marriage now what is it that has happened when I graduated from college I was 21 as almost everybody else was and it seemed to me that almost everybody in my class was getting married within the next year a whole lot of weddings took place immediately after graduation when my grandfather graduated from college he graduated from college, got a job and got a wife all in one year he was 21 years old what has happened and I think it's the self me first attitude unwillingness to accept responsibility it is an awesome

responsibility for a man to take a wife how is he going to support her which job is he going to take and there are too many thousands of options how will he ever manage if we have children etc.

etc. etc. God knows exactly what he is doing and I want to read to you a quotation from one of those saints whose writings I have been so helped by St.

Francis de Sales his dates are 1567-1622 strive to see God in all things without exception that means your singleness strive to see God in all things without exception and acquiesce in his will with absolute submission do everything for God uniting yourself to him by a mere upward glance or by the overflowing of your heart towards him never be in a hurry do everything quietly and in a calm spirit do not lose your inward peace for anything whatsoever even if your whole world seems upset commend all to God and then lie still and be at rest in his bosom whatever happens abide steadfast in a determination to cling simply to God trusting to his eternal love for you and if you find that you have wandered forth from this shelter recall your heart quietly and simply maintain a holy simplicity of

mind and do not smother yourself with a host of cares wishes or longings under any pretext if you start smothering yourself with a host of cares and wishes and longings you will be disabling yourself from serving God with all your heart and so it is in our marriage that we learn sacrifice it is in our singleness that we learn sacrifice it is in whatever state God has put us that God wants to sanctify us to shape us into the image of his son you all know Romans 8.28 it says everything that happens fits into a pattern for good that's one of the translations all things work together for good to them that love God to them that are called according to his purpose now what is his purpose the following verse Romans 8.29 makes it very clear his purpose is that you and I should be conformed to the

image of Christ shaped to the image now what does it take to shape an image well it takes hammer blows it takes the chippings of the chisel and it takes the rasping of the file and all of us if we had time to testify here would probably be able to think of one or two hammer blows in our lives not many but a few a lot of chippings of the chisel but every single day the rasping of the file to get off those sharp corners and those rough edges and that is what God is up to things work together for good in order that we might be shaped to the image of Christ and you single women are being shaped to the image of Christ by being alone by being single by not being given that which everybody else seems to be given this is your assigned place I gave you those lovely words from the hymn yesterday

let my soul like Mary be thine earthly sanctuary if you're single you are not going to bear a baby in your womb in the physical sense but like Mary your female body can become the earthly sanctuary of the Lord of the universe he says will you let me in will you accept my conditions will you love me will you trust me will you praise me some of the most gloriously godly women I've ever known have been single all their lives radiant wonderful women many of the missionaries Isaiah 58 10 is a crucial verse which has particular application I think to singles who are so prone to feel sorry for themselves and to wonder why people aren't nicer to them and the couples everything's done for couples in the church nothing is done for the singles they feel so bad and they don't get invited to the homes

of these couples who have children I say to them well what how many times have you invited the family to your house or how many times if you only have one room to live in have you taken pizza over to their house to entertain them there or said to the father and mother let me do the babysitting tonight instead of sitting around feeling so sorry for yourself Isaiah 58 10 says this I'm just giving you my paraphrase but if you pour yourself out for the hungry then the Lord himself is going to satisfy your soul and you will become like a watered garden but you're going to have to stop feeling sorry for yourself servants are people who are free to serve if you are going to be a servant of Jesus Christ you have to get rid of your own agenda you have to say yes Lord yes to this man that you have

given me for my husband yes to these children some of whom are very difficult at times yes to my singleness yes to this place where you have put us where we didn't want to be assigned yes yes yes Lord when the angel told Mary about her assignment Mary said yes servants of all let my soul like Mary be thine earthly sanctuary God bless you

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