

The Spirit of the Bondservant

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having the spirit of a bondservant, which is characterized by love, humility, and faithfulness, and is based on the Cross.

Scripture: Matthew 20:25

Topics: "Servanthood", "Love in Service"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the spirit of servanthood as exemplified by Jesus Christ, who took on the form of a bondservant, serving others selflessly and with love. He highlights that true service is not about personal rights or recognition but is rooted in humility, love, and faithfulness. The essence of being a bondservant is to abandon personal interests for the sake of others, reflecting the love of Christ in our service. Sparks urges that love must be the driving force behind our actions, as it enables us to overcome challenges and remain faithful in our calling. Ultimately, he reminds us that our servanthood is a preparation for greater responsibilities in the future, grounded in the sacrifice of the Cross.

Transcript

Readings: Matt. 20:25-28; John 13:16; Luke 19:17; Phil. 2:7-8; 2 Tim. 2:20-21.

These passages all bear upon the matter of service, and they deal with service from centre to circumference; that is, right at the centre in the matter of service the Lord Jesus Himself is placed. He took the place and the form of a bondservant, and He said of Himself: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". So that the Master is presented to us as the chief Servant, as the exemplary Servant, the very model Servant and the model of service.

It is not so much the service as the spirit of the Servant that we want to consider at this time, not mainly the work, but the atmosphere of Him Who did it. It is something to contemplate and to meditate upon. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister" is a tremendous statement. The ministry of the Son of man is not that of an official, but of a bondservant. On more than one occasion He sought to impress upon His disciples that their lives here were on the same basis, and were to be governed by exactly the same spirit. They were here to be servants, and servants of all.

If you knew what that word "bondservant" meant in the realm where it was the common language, you would know that it was a very strong word. It certainly did not mean that the one who was in that position could consult his own preferences, and do as he liked or desired. There could never be any consultation

with self. The bonds slave had no rights whatever in the realm of what was personal to himself. The very fact that he was a bonds slave meant that all his own personal rights were removed. He was possessed for a purpose - it may have been (as was usual) to serve a household - and for that household he must live, and never consult his own feelings or interests. The Lord Jesus said that He took that position.

Probably if we had looked at the face of the common bonds slave of those days, we should have seen the depressed, joyless countenance of one who had very little interest in life. But that was not so with the One Who presented Himself as the chief of the bonds slaves, the Lord Jesus; that is, this position of His did not mean that because He could not consult His own interests or feelings He was miserable, and life had very little meaning for Him. The spirit of this Bonds slave was the spirit of joyous, glad and grateful abandonment. To be cut off from Himself and all that would please Himself meant no hardship, because He was always viewing it from the positive side, and not from the negative - from the side of gain to others and the satisfaction to the One Whose Servant He was.

The Governing Motive of Service

That introduces the governing motive of service. What is the governing motive of the bonds slave of Jesus Christ? It is not compulsion, it is not option; it is love. No ministry of the servant of Jesus Christ can be a triumphant ministry unless there is a deep, strong, abiding love. Love is the motive force of this kind of service. There is all the difference between that and what is official, by appointment - what we call organised work and service. Sooner or later we shall break down, find ourselves brought to a standstill where we can go no further, in a terrible state of confusion about the whole situation, unless there is an adequate love, not only for the Lord but for all those in the midst of whom we are called to serve. Love is going to solve our problems and to bring us into victory; but apart from a sufficient love the problems of human make-up, the many differences of disposition and character and all that goes to make up a company, and the continuous drain and strain, with all the pressure that comes from the enemy, will present a problem, a perplexity and a paralysing task. Only love will get us through, and love is the motive-power of the servant.

We may ask, How did the Lord manage to maintain the relationship with His disciples? They were so difficult, so different, so disappointing. "Having loved his own... he loved them unto the end". That is the answer. Love got above all that they were; love gave the extra thing which enabled Him not to take them just as they were and end there.

So in our relationships, the spirit of the true servant is only possible as there is a deep love. Upon all those who have ideas of serving the Lord and working for Him I would urge this consideration, that the work of the Lord is not some thing which you outwardly and objectively take up. It is (if it is the true thing) the outworking of love for the Lord and for those who are the objects of His love. That is very simple, but it goes to the heart of things. Sooner or later you and I will be brought to the position where the question will be, Have we sufficient love to go on? Can we find enough love in our hearts to get us through this particularly difficult situation? The situation will be constituted by all those factors which resolve us into servants, bonds slaves. It would not have become so acute if only we had been esteemed and honoured, and held in high regard. But when the situation is created by a great deal being expected of us, by demands being made upon our generosity, our kindness, calling for an almost inexhaustible fund of patience, and the letting go of personal feeling; when really the main issue in the crisis is this - I am being imposed upon: too much is being expected of me: I am treated as a servant - that is where we are found out. Love alone can support this service. We all need a great deal more love to get through with our

servanthood.

Love Includes Humility

Love embraces other things. He took "the form of a bondservant... and... humbled himself". To be a true servant according to Jesus Christ means humility. The exact opposite of the servant spirit is the spirit of pride, and there is that in most men and women which at some time or other is discovered and manifests itself, which does not like to be regarded as a servant. There is a revolt against being a servant, at everybody's beck and call. Liberty! Freedom! Do as you like! Be your own master! State your own terms! To let go all such personal rights, to be a servant, is not human nature as we know it. "He humbled himself." There is no place for pride in a true fellowship with the Lord Jesus, because it is the fellowship of bondslaves. Pride keeps many people out of the kingdom of God. They will not humble themselves to acknowledge that they are needy sinners. They will not come to the place where they would be publicly recognised as one of those Christians! Pride keeps them out. Pride will take them to hell, just as it took Satan from heaven to hell. Pride is the enemy of believers as much as of the unsaved. It robs us of the real value of service. We have such stilted ideas of service. We do not mind being in the Lord's service if it means something that brings us recognition. There are tremendous dangers about recognised service. The Lord Jesus humbled Himself.

Love Includes Faithfulness

What is the way of increased and added usefulness? In the parable of our Lord we read that it was said to the servant: "Well done, thou good servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities" (Luke 19:17). Does not that often find us out? Our bit is not important enough! It does not seem to count very much! It is so small as hardly to be worth notice! "...thou wast found faithful in a very little..." Does that fit you? Do you say, 'Yes, "very little", that truly is my position.' Do you see that you are in the very place where the Master takes account of your faithfulness, with a view to increasing your usefulness? Do believe it! Whether you feel you can accept it or not it is true, that you will never be given an enlarged usefulness by the Lord until you have been faithful in the very little. You may take it that if the Lord promotes He always does so because He takes account of the faithfulness in the very little. The thing that matters is not what people think about us as servants but our attitude to what the Lord has given us to do. If He has said: 'This is what I want you to do...', and then He can go on and say 'And this! 'And this!', adding to our responsibilities, it will always be on that principle of our being faithful in a very little. We are in the school which has higher standards, larger possibilities.

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). That is another aspect. "...a vessel unto honour... meet... prepared unto every good work". On what condition? "If a man... purge himself from these..." From what? "Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour, and some unto dishonour". Our translation is defective. It does not really say that in the original. It is difficult to put it into one English word. It really says, There are vessels unto honour and there are vessels not unto honour (not dishonour). The Lord has not in His House vessels unto dishonour in that positive sense. All His vessels that He has chosen are for good purposes, but there are differences. There are some unto honour, there are some not unto that honour. It is possible to be a vessel unto honour, by separating, by sanctifying, by consecrating, so that it is something more than just an ordinary vessel without any noteworthy purpose. It is a matter of being wholly consecrated to the Lord. That is the principle of honour and meet-ness for use and being prepared unto every good work.

It is the positive side - not just being in the House without any special feature or character, but a vessel there right out for the Lord, as we say. These two kinds of vessels are there - those which are just there, really featureless vessels, not marked by any real value, and the others which are wholly devoted, wholly consecrated, stretched out to be all they can for the Lord.

The Basis is the Cross

The basis of all this is the Cross: "...and to give his life..." He became obedient unto death, the death of the Cross. This love can only spring out of a heart in which the flesh has been dealt with by the Cross. The self life must go to the Cross. This patience, this humility, this devotion, this love is all the out-working of a crucified life, a life which from the beginning has come to the Cross and abides there.

The Lord give us the spirit of the servant, and may there in the future be about us all more of that which was about Him - "not to be ministered unto but to minister." That is what we are here for. Demands - constant and ever growing demands! That is what we are here for. Being imposed upon! Never allowed to have a position of our own! Put it that way if you like; but what we are here for is to serve. We are bondslaves. The day of exaltation and glory is coming, it is not now. There will be a change some day: "...have thou authority..." But just now we are the bondslaves of Jesus Christ. May we be that in truth.

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