

Theological Background

1/2

Words relating to 'servant' and 'service' are central in Christian theology. Some of the most important prophecies in Isaiah speak of the coming of the 'Servant of the Lord' and his role as a 'suffering servant.' That is why Jesus said that he 'came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. This turned upside down the normal relationship between master and disciple, leader and follower. In many ways, this astonishing action symbolizes the essence of the Incarnation: God stooping to share the human condition. Jesus is very clear about the meaning of his action: 'Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done.'

The parable of the Good Samaritan shows we should serve those in need whoever they are. Such service is not offered to gain some advantage for ourselves. 'Going the extra mile' involves sacrifice, putting ourselves out for someone else's benefit.

Serving God means serving others. It also means that we cannot serve other masters as well - such as money. However, the Christian message is equally clear that service is not all about restrictions. It is precisely in a life of service that we become most truly free.

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2/2

Biblical References

Isaiah 42:1

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Isaiah 53:3-12

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.....he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities by his wounds we are healed..... After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Luke 10:33-34

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him.

John 13:3-5

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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.

John 13:14-15

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Galatians 5:13-14

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself".

Philippians 2:5-7

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.