

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Mark 9:30-37; 10:35-45 at Victory of the Lamb on September 27th, 2015.

**Series: Chiseled**

**Today's Focus: Windows Into Our Hearts**

**"Shaped To Be A Servant"**

It's amazing what people will argue about, isn't it? This week Shaquille O'Neal announced his all-time top five greatest NBA players list. And I know what some of you are thinking. Who cares? And you're right, not a big deal. I won't argue with you there. There are much bigger problems in the world to talk about. And after all, it's football season! But of course this promptly fueled a great debate and as a basketball fan I was drawn in. People said, "How could you pick Karl Malone instead of Tim Duncan, Shaq?" "How could he slight Kobe Bryant and leave him off the list? Kobe's going to be livid when he finds out." That sort of thing. And of course the internet fuels these kind of debates like never before whether it's with athletes or politicians or movie stars. Who's the greatest? It's the kind of question that fits in perfectly with people who celebrate rankings. With this kind of thinking there are winners and losers. There are smart people and there are stupid people. There are those who are better and there are those who are worse. Fortunately, this kind of stuff is only that's for ego-centric people like professional athletes and politicians and movie stars, right?

Well not so fast. Today we're going to actually get a window into our own hearts too. What is the agenda of our hearts as we live out our lives in relation to others at work, at school, in our community and in our church? Is there any scheming or selfish ambition or sour grapes in there? Is there any kind of "I deserve to get my way because of who I am"...is there any, "I deserve to get to act this way after all I've done and sacrificed"...is there any, "If you're smart you'll take my advice because if you don't then I'm going to take my ball and go home" kind of attitudes?

In particular today as we get a window into our hearts, we're going to see how God sometimes gets out the chisel of suffering and the cross to shape us once again into the kind of people he wants us to be. And what God wants to shape us to be is servants. He wants you to go home today with a brand new perspective on your life as a follower of Jesus. He wants you to understand what it means to think, "**God is shaping me to serve others.**"

<sup>30</sup> *They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,* <sup>31</sup> *because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."* <sup>32</sup> *But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.* So just like last week we now again hear Jesus describe the path to glory as one that goes through suffering and the cross. We talked about how this was not only true for Jesus, but it's also true for all of us who follow after Jesus and call him our Lord and Savior. The cross of suffering here on earth will of necessity come before we receive the crown of glory in heaven. So right out of the gate today I've got to make this statement.

Those who preach that God promises prosperity now as if “You just need to believe better like us and you will be more richly blessed like us” are preaching a lie. That’s not the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s a counterfeit lie. Yet how hard it is to see this when the devil wants us to think that we should be able to just put in some time and effort doing our religious duty and then we can specify to God what we think we deserve and how he should treat us.

<sup>33</sup> *They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the road?”* <sup>34</sup> *But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.*

Can you believe this? We’re not talking about just the playful banter of a bunch of guys in a fantasy football league. These guys were trash talking about stuff like who’s got the biggest faith? Which one of them had given up the most lucrative business to follow Jesus? Who deserved special recognition because of their accomplishments in the mission field? Who should get to make the important decisions? Who did Jesus like the most? Which one of them deserved to be MVP of Jesus’ team? And here’s the thing about all this. These were the guys who were closest to Jesus doing this. When we get a window into their hearts, what do we see? There was some selfish ambition in there. There were some inflated and (as we’ll see later) sensitive egos. There was some glory seeking going on. They were tempted to think they were God’s special gifts to the kingdom almost as if God owed them some kind of special status or blessing.

Do you ever act like that? You ever find yourself comparing yourself to others, easily finding fault with others on the team, or criticizing others beyond their backs because they’re not sacrificing as much as you, they’re not serving as much as you, they’re not as talented as you, they’re not as smart as you, they don’t love God as much as you, or they simply don’t appreciate you the way you think you deserve? You ever think you should be the one in charge to the point that you feel like if you don’t get your way you’re going to pout? I’d be lying if I denied ever thinking or feeling any of these things. And I think the window to all of our hearts is wide open here, isn’t it? So here’s what Jesus did. He wanted to shape his disciples to be servants. He wants to do the same thing with us.

<sup>35</sup> *Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”*

<sup>36</sup> *He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them,*  
<sup>37</sup> *“Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.”*

This is so contrary to the wisdom of the world, isn’t it? You want to get to the top in the kingdom of God, then start at the bottom and work your way down! Chew on that one. That’s the path to greatness in the kingdom of God, friends. Jesus says, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.”

And how does Jesus get his point across? He asks them to consider giving time and attention to welcoming a child. He says that if you welcome a little child in his name you're actually welcoming him. You see in Jesus' day, the grown-ups basically ignored kids. The adults, especially the men, had more important grown up things to do. Women could take care of the kids. But Jesus says welcoming kids is a way to get God's attention and give him glory.

I think about our kids' ministry volunteers. Not a lot of glory over there all the time. Maybe not always a lot of thanks either. It's probable not just possible that I've failed to help all of you express adequate appreciation for those who sacrifice not going to church to care for and teach other people's kids. But make no mistake, God appreciates it! It's not forgotten in his eyes. Kids' ministry is hugely important in the eyes of God.

And I think of foster parents and guardians. I think of social workers and childcare providers. I think of those who work in group homes caring for those who can't care for themselves too. I think of hospice care providers with people and I think of stay at home moms and dads with their little ones. In our society we don't generally hold such people in as high esteem as we do athletes or engineers or business leaders or venture capitalists. But Jesus is giving us a window here not just into our own hearts, but also into God's. God wants to shape us to be servants. Yet it's not always so easy. Listen to this:

<sup>35</sup> *Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."* (A little bit later... "We want you to do whatever we want, Jesus." I mean...how about "Please" guys? Or how about at least, "If it's your will, God?")

<sup>36</sup> *"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.*

<sup>37</sup> *They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."*

<sup>38</sup> *"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"*

<sup>39</sup> *"We can," they answered.*

*Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with,"<sup>40</sup> but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*

<sup>41</sup> *When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.* I was thinking about this. It's so easy to feel slighted or take offense or become indignant when working on a team, isn't it? It's almost inevitable when sinful human beings work together, even in the church. The devil sure wants this to happen. And I don't think here that the ten disciples of Jesus here were indignant at James and John as if they were overly sensitive but more so because they beat them to the punch in

the asking the question that they did, like they were thinking... “What about me, Jesus? That was going to be my question. Don’t I deserve a special place too?” But then Jesus turns worldly wisdom upside down again, especially when it comes to leadership. <sup>42</sup> *Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, <sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> 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.”*

Friends, what does leadership look like? It looks like this...a towel around Jesus’ waist washing his disciples’ dirty feet {pic}. This is finally how Jesus was going



to teach his disciples about servant leadership. He was going to show them. What does this servant leadership look like? It looks like this {pic} ...such love to make the ultimate sacrifice, the ransom payment that sets you and me free from not only from sin’s guilt but sin’s power for all eternity...praise God! Thank you Jesus!



What then is church? Well it is in one sense a place to come to be served. Let me explain this. Church is a place first and foremost to be served by Jesus who comes to you through his Word and Sacraments to deliver to you the forgiveness of your sins which you could never deserve but which he completely earns, declares and distributes now through your pastor. But then God would have us rethink church a bit too. Because while on the one hand church is a place to come be served by Jesus, it’s also a place for you to come be equipped to serve others in the name of Jesus. The church then as God has designed it is not just a place for you to come and have things your way but a place for you to help others find the One who is the way, the truth, and the life.

And friends, that is why we say that one of our church’s core values is volunteer involvement. In other words we believe the church is most effective when all members roll up their sleeves like Jesus did to humbly serve others using their gifts and abilities. Because every one of you has gifts to serve. Every one of you has time to serve. Every one of you has talents to serve. And I’m not just talking about serving at church. I’m also talking about serving others out there in the world being the church.

I thank God for the things he’s doing in us and through us as the church. This week I got to help out for an afternoon building Kayla’s Playground along with about 80 people from our community. There were people from our church there serving too which was fantastic to see. And there were people from a number of churches in our local community which is also wonderful. What an impact on our community to have so many people not just talking about Christ’s love but showing it—Christians serving in their community in the name of Jesus. It’s a beautiful thing.

This week also I was blown away at the number of Builders For Christ volunteers who were back on our construction site commuting from up to an hour or more away working hard to help get our

ministry center building finished and looking nice. Members from church continue to provide and host and serve alongside them. This is wonderful, beautiful thing to be a part of

Yesterday I got to run a half-marathon pushing someone and then helping to carry them across the finish line to give them the experience of a life time. There were a number of people from our church participating and helping. In fact did you know, you helped us to purchase our very own racing chair last year as part of an Operation Jesus Cares project {pic}? Scott and I got to use it. And imagine my surprise when I saw this on the My Team Triumph trailer {pic – “Powered by Victory of the Lamb”}.



Friends, I could go on and on. Just thank you. Thank you letting God shape you to serve others whether it's in your home—I'm talking about your spouse, your kids, your parents. God has called you to serve them. Or whether it's your neighbors, or whether it's your co-workers, your classmates, your community. **God has shaped us to be servants.**

A couple weeks ago when Robert from Texas was talking after church, giving us a BFC update, he said something I haven't stopped thinking about. He said, "Don't just pray for opportunities to serve. Pray first for a servant's heart." Friends, that's what this is really about. God is after our hearts. And we see first and foremost in our Savior Jesus in how he served us so that he could save us. So pray for a servant's heart. But then, let God shape your heart. **God wants to shape you and me to be servants.** Amen.

### My Next Steps

**Question to Ponder:** Who has been an example to you of a Christ-like servant? What effect has that person had on your life?

**Treasure to Share:** *"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"* (Mark 10:45).

**Opportunities to Serve:** Here are just a few idea starters...

- ◇ Volunteer at church
- ◇ Visit someone in the hospital or nursing home
- ◇ Have a special family time
- ◇ Call or send a note to someone who might be lonely or hurting
- ◇ Invite someone to church or Bible study
- ◇ Pray for my pastor
- ◇ Ask if anyone in the neighborhood needs help with a task
- ◇ Consider learning about becoming a foster parent
- ◇ Get involved with our local pregnancy center run by WELS Lutherans For Life