

## The Servant of the LORD and His Servant People

**1 Peter 2:16** (NET) – “Live as free people, not using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but as God’s slaves.”

- Like the apostle Paul, Peter links living rightly with understanding rightly our identity.<sup>1</sup>
  - Here, Peter makes it clear that our identity as Christians is that of a *doulos* (“slave, bond-servant, servant”).<sup>2</sup>
    - Thus, if we are to live rightly as God’s people in God’s world, we must not only realize that we are His servants, but also live as servants.<sup>3</sup>

As we will see, “servant of the LORD” motif is an important and central<sup>4</sup> theme that pervades and interprets the entirety of Scripture, and thus is essential for us to grasp in our heads and hearts, if we desire to live as He would have us to.

We could certainly jump immediately to the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself is the fulfilment and essence of what it means to be Yahweh’s servant; however, surveying the entirety of the biblical corpus will not only help us to appreciate and love Him more fully; we will also see more clearly what it means for *us* to “follow His example” (1 Peter 2:21-22), bringing God’s salvation and blessing to the nations.

After a basic introduction, we will spend our time looking at the redemptive historical “servants” that prepare us for *the* Servant *par excellence*, namely Jesus, who not only fulfills all the OT types, but becomes the model for His new covenant servant-people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Many will remember the oft-repeated application in our study through Ephesians many years ago: “Become who you are!”

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this is not the *only* title used to describe the identity of God’s people. For example, the Bible says Christians are also, “sons” and “children” of God, “heirs” of God, “the inheritance” of God, the “dwelling place” of God, and “the people” of God (to name but a few).

<sup>3</sup> As we will see later, God equips His servant-people with the Holy Spirit to carry out His will and purposes in the world.

<sup>4</sup> In his comprehensive treatment of biblical theology, Charles Scobie treats “the servant of the LORD” as one of the four major themes of the Bible around which other theological ideas cluster. See *The Ways of God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 301-466.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I am following the lead of Matthew Harmon’s most excellent book, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People*. Herein, he traces the servant line beginning with Adam, through to Moses, Joshua, David, and Israel, culminating ultimately in Jesus, and extending finally to His church.

## Introduction:

“We do not want him to be our king.”<sup>6</sup>

“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n.”<sup>7</sup>

Satan’s words to his demonic forces in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* capture well the lie he has told to humanity throughout the ages – rather than joyfully serve the true and living God, it is better to reject His authority and determine one’s own destiny even if that leads to an eternity in Hell.<sup>8</sup>

When one reads through the Bible, he or she sees that the values of God are often at odds with – and even clash – those of the world. This is especially true with regards to the concept of servanthood. As Longman notes,

In the Bible’s grand pattern of reversal of values, the worldly standard of servanthood is something ignominious; but in the economics of the kingdom, the epithet “servant of the Lord” becomes an honorific title.<sup>9</sup>

Servitude and slavery were part of the fabric of both the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. As Dempster notes, the meaning of this word<sup>10</sup> in most cases is that of someone subordinate to a master.<sup>11</sup> Longman writes,

What all the models have in common is the existence of a superior to be served, and a task of service to complete. Servants are called upon to have an attitude of deference to their superiors, to seek their benefit rather than to be self-seeking and to be obedient and useful.<sup>12</sup>

However, it is important to remember that the dignity of the servant is commensurate with that of the master he or she serves. As Harmon notes, in certain contexts the title carries an honorific sense: “far from communicating a

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 19:14 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, line 263.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Matthew Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 774.

<sup>10</sup> *Ebed* (Hebrew [806X]) and *doulos* (Greek [124X]).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Dempster, “The Servant of the LORD,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 129.

<sup>12</sup> Longman, *DBI*, 774.

sense of bondage or oppression, it communicated a privileged position of authority and status.”<sup>13</sup>

- For example, in Genesis 24, Abraham’s servant, sent on a very important mission by his master,<sup>14</sup> would certainly not have been ashamed to have identified himself with one of the richest and most important men in the world at that time.
- Likewise, in **1 Corinthians 7:22**, the apostle Paul says that Christians are simultaneously – and gloriously – free *in Christ* and slaves *to Christ*.
- As we will see later, “slave/servant of Christ” is one of the apostle Paul’s favorite titles he uses to introduce himself in his letters.

Whether we like it or not, we must realize the inescapable reality that – in the iconic words of Bob Dylan – “we all gotta’ serve somebody.”

Commenting on **Romans 6:22-23**, pastor Steven Lawson writes:

Before we become a Christian, we are slaves of sin, held in bondage to its cruel tyranny. When we were born again, we became a slave of God, now obedient to a new master. There is never a moment in anyone’s life in which we are not a slave. There is not an interval of time between these two slaveries in which we are in neutral territory, not a slave to any master. When we were converted, the door of the prison house of sin was opened, our chains were unlocked, and we were ushered out of our former bondage to sin. Immediately, we were brought into a new slavery to righteousness.<sup>15</sup>

Before we look at the individual servants of the Lord in the OT, one of the most important take-aways in our study is that God’s will is not only to use a singular servant of the Lord to accomplish His will and mission; He also has ordained that His servant (singular) is to produce a servant people (plural).

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<sup>13</sup> Harmon, *Servant*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> That is, to procure a wife for his master’s son. This is most certainly a type of the greater gospel reality in the New Testament, where we see the Spirit sent on mission to procure the church as Christ’s sought-out bride. See <https://smbconline.com/sermon/the-holy-spirit-procures-his-church/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://onepassion.org/2018-7-23-from-slavery-to-slavery-romans-620-22/>

Through this lens, I truly believe we will never read our Bibles, or see our vocation as Christ's servant-people,<sup>16</sup> the same as before.

### Conclusion:

1. God has purposed His will in heaven to be carried out on earth by those who are His servants.
  - His will becomes our will.
    - Dempster: “[The servant] has been entrusted with a mission and is single-minded in pursuit of accomplishing his master’s will.”<sup>17</sup>
2. To belong to the Lord GOD *is* to be His servant. It is our identity, and thus is not optional.<sup>18</sup>
  - For example, see **Matthew 7:21**; **Luke 6:46**, etc.
3. To be a servant of the Lord is the greatest honor and privilege in the world!
  - As we will see, the very mission of Jesus was to not only die to forgive His people, but to redeem them unto a life of service and good works.<sup>19</sup>
4. Holiness *is* servanthood
  - To be sanctified *is* to become more and more of a servant: the more we are transformed into Christ’s image, the more servant-like we will become in our hearts and lives.
    - See especially **Philippians 2:1-13**

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<sup>16</sup> As we will see, the ‘servant’ plays a vital role in restoring humanity to a right relationship with God, for the Bible repeatedly teaches that the servant’s actions are to benefit all the nations of the earth. See, for example, T.D. Alexander, *The Servant-King* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 107. See also John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume Two: Israel’s Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 740-746.

<sup>17</sup> Dempster, “The Servant of the Lord,” p. 129. This, of course, is seen most clearly in Jesus, the perfect servant, who Himself said that His “food” was to do His Father’s will (**John 4:34**; cf. **Hebrews 10:7**).

<sup>18</sup> For a full treatment of “Lordship salvation,” see John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. **Titus 2:11-14**

- Servanthood is what a “holy nation”<sup>20</sup> – following the example of her King – looks like.
  - Is this (i.e., servanthood) how the world perceives us as God’s people, both individually and corporately?

**Application:**

1. **Pray** that God would give you more of the “mind of Christ,” which, according to Philippians 2, is that of a servant.
2. **Ask** God to give you practical opportunities – with your treasure, your time, and your talents – to sacrificially serve others in love.
  - Start with those closest you and work outwards in concentric circles.
  - Start with “baby steps” if necessary and work yourself “up.”
    - Illustration of “grenade”
3. **Realize** that you will be most miserable when you live to serve yourself, and most joyful when you live to serve God through serving others.
  - As we will see, the Holy Spirit empowers the Lord’s Servants for *His* mission, not theirs.<sup>21</sup>
    - Serving others is what it truly looks like to be “Spirit-filled.”
    - Servanthood is what the “true humanity” looks like.<sup>22</sup>
4. **Pray** that this would increasingly be true of Grace Community Church!!<sup>23</sup>

Soli Deo Gloria!!

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<sup>20</sup> See **1 Peter 2:9-10**

<sup>21</sup> This was true especially of Jesus, whose baptism in the Spirit was to accomplish the Father’s will and mission.

<sup>22</sup> This is what the “Son of Man” came to do and to be (cf. Mark 10:45).

<sup>23</sup> And especially for her leadership.