

How great is Tiger Woods? Seriously, how great is he? All eyes are on the Master's this weekend as Tiger stepped out of rehab for sexual addiction and onto the first tee at Augusta National to the delight of millions of people and a whole bunch of television executives. Surely all this attention must be directed toward a truly great man. Isn't it? What is greatness? If greatness is defined by achievement then Tiger may well be the greatest golfer of all time. If greatness is defined by famousness, then Madonna is great. So was Michael Jackson. How about J.F.K.? Bill Clinton? George W. Bush? I guess it all depends on how you define greatness?

As with most things, Jesus' definition of greatness is much different than that of our contemporary culture. No big surprise. We just spent twelve weeks exploring the upside down nature of the kingdom. Just about everything Jesus taught about the kingdom was backwards from the way of this world. For example, Jesus said if you want to gain what you can never lose then let go of that which you can never keep. In other words, you have to lose in order to gain. He also said if you want to live you have to die. Life doesn't precede death, death precedes life. Jesus often addressed the subject of greatness. He defined greatness in terms of service. **Matthew 20:26-28** "Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, (diakonos) ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (doulos); ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

On another occasion He said, **Matthew 23:10-12**, "Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, *that is*, Christ. ¹¹ But the greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

One day Jesus overheard His disciples talking about which of them was the greatest. I have a hard time imagining such a conversation but I'm sure it wasn't as naked as, "Hey guys, which one of us is the greatest?" It was probably a more subtle kind of self-promotion. Jesus sat them down and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Mark 9:35

Greatness is defined by service. May 2nd will be a great day at Fellowship as we leave the building and go into our neighborhood to serve. This morning I want to explain why.

I. Our service is a reflection of how we see God. Think of the way God has revealed Himself.

Isaiah 40:10-11 ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him And His recompense before Him. ¹¹ Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs And carry *them* in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing *ewes*.

Isaiah 49:14-15, "But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me, And the Lord has forgotten me.' ¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you."

The ultimate revelation of God is Jesus who said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served,

but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” We were created by a God who revealed Himself as One who serves. We serve because He serves. Unless our service to others is done for the glory of God then we will have to invent some other motive. Those who have no relationship with God usually serve for humanitarian reasons. I’ve always wondered why. What makes humans worth serving? If we are all products of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, then helping the weak only threatens the human race. Having a clear concept of God gives us a clear concept of service.

“Nothing twists and deforms the soul more than a low or unworthy conception of God...If we think of Him as cold and exacting we shall find it impossible to love Him, and our lives will be ridden with servile fear. If again, we hold Him to be kind and understanding our whole inner life will mirror that idea...the truth is that God is the most winsome of all beings and His service is one of unspeakable pleasure. He is all love, and those who trust Him need never know anything but that love.” A. W. Tozer

We serve in His name. To do something in the name of another is to do it like they would do it. Ultimately our actions reflect our deeply held convictions about God. If our image of God is distorted then our actions will be as well. There are a lot of angry people in the world today doing some ugly things in the name of God. One anti-government group called the Hutaree militia (these people claim that Hutaree means “Christian militia”) was indicted a couple of weeks ago of plotting to attack and kill several law enforcement officials. Their slogan is, “violence solves everything.” They see our population changing racially, the soaring public debt, and a terrible economy. Bankers and other financial elites get bailed out while those with no stroke in society lose their jobs and their homes. These angry, resentful, fearful people see the same problems you see but they clearly have a distorted view of God. So do the people who walk into a crowded market with a few pounds of explosives strapped to their bodies and blow themselves and everyone in their immediate vicinity into eternity. They do it in the name of Allah. Either they are seriously misguided or this Allah character is a violent, vengeful, arbitrary leader. God created us to reflect who He is. Our service to others must be grounded in the character of God and not in the goodness of man.

II. Our service is a reflection of how we see ourselves. If I don’t see myself as a servant then my service will be an extracurricular activity and not a lifestyle. In our culture service is something you pay for at a restaurant or a car dealership. We grade businesses on their service. Those who serve us do so because it is their job. When they punch out and go home they are no longer obligated to serve. Even churches compete with one another by telling potential members, “Let us know how we can serve you.”

A servant is a “diakonos.” But there is an even stronger word used by Peter, James, Paul, Jude, and John in their NT letters. They refer to themselves as a “bond-servant” or “doulos.” A diakonos attends to the needs of another. A person who waits tables could be called a diakonos. At the end of the day a diakonos goes home. A doulos on the other hand is one who is so devoted to another that they set aside their own personal interests. They are tied to the one they serve. Bond servants do not have a life of their own.

God placed it upon the heart of John G. Paton’s to go to the South Sea Islands and preach the Gospel to those who had never heard. When he announced his intentions one elderly Christian man said, ‘You’ll be eaten by Cannibals!’ Paton

responded, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer." (quoted by Piper in *Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 106)

Mr. Dickson was a diakonos. John G. Paton was a doulos. True service is an act of worship. It not only benefits man but it blesses God. ^{NIV} **Romans 12:1** Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual (or reasonable) act of worship.

III. Our service is a reflection of how we see other people. Because every human being is created in the image of God, every human being has inherent worth. That's the dirty little secret about abortion that no political candidate ever talks about. If we are cosmic accidents then a pregnant woman simply has a lump of tissue in her womb, no different from a wart or a mole. If we are created in the image of God then that woman is carrying a child who deserves the same rights of any human being as well as the protection appropriate to the most vulnerable members of society. So if you want to know why we are going to serve the people in Vickery Meadow, many of whom will not appreciate our efforts, my answer is, "Because the residents there are created in the image of God and we go in Jesus' name as ambassadors of a King who left His royal throne in Heaven and came to earth to live as a human being, not just any human being but a despised human being who would be mistreated and ultimately executed as a criminal."

I have no idea what God will do through us but I have a very clear idea of why we go. And so we go, trusting God that He will be pleased to use us in ways we may not ever even know about because **when you go you never know**. Recently we sent an advance team to Haiti to see how we could help those people who have lived through a devastating earthquake. The team went trusting God that they could bring hope to that devastated country. They took a few things with them to help out. Listen to the email from Ben Kilpatrick who, along with wife Katie, are our missionaries in Haiti...

"One of the things you brought to us in Haiti were 3 boxes of hypoallergenic formula. I gave all of the formula to a missionary couple, Shelly and Corrigan, who have a ministry to single women and a close relationship with a lot of orphanages around Port-au-Prince. That formula is very expensive in the states about \$25 a jar (you sent 18) and almost impossible to find here in Haiti. Shelly was visiting orphanages around Port and had a conversation with an orphanage director who mentioned they had a very sick little baby. He had not been feeding and was close to death a few times. The orphanage found that he

responded well to this same kind of formula but they were almost out and very concerned about what would happen to the little guy when the formula was gone. Shelly, was able to take them the 18 jars of formula so the baby can keep eating, Now he has enough to eat until he starts on solid food. Corrigan summed it up this way, 'Your friends saved this kids life.' Cheers Fellowship. You saved at least one life."

John 12:24-26, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. ²⁶ If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him."