

## Service 2 - Serving God or Serving the Temple?

- Exodus 3:8, 12** “Then the Lord said.....when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”
  - Egypt symbolizes this world, and God’s purpose in delivering us from Egypt—bringing us out of the world and into His name—is threefold. First, He wants to save us from the Egyptians and deliver us from the world and the bondage of Satan. Second, He wants to lead us into the good and beautiful land flowing with milk and honey. His purpose in redeeming us is to bring us into His abundant presence, where all of God’s riches belong to us. Lastly, as stated in verse 12, “We will serve Him on this mountain.” God redeemed us to serve Him fearlessly and confidently forever and ever.
- Exodus 7:16, 8:1, 20, 9:1, 13, 10:3, 10-11, 24-26** “ Then the Lord said to Moses... Let my people go, that they may serve me.”
  - Every time God sent Moses, it was to say to Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may serve me.” God wants to rescue us from the hands of Satan, so that we no longer serve Satan or this world. Instead, He wants us to wholeheartedly serve Him. This is the purpose of His redemption.
  - 10: 11-12 Pharaoh said, “you may go. But leave your wives and children behind.” Pharaoh chose to use their loved ones as hostages. Many husbands continue serving this world because of their wives and children. But God does not compromise. He says, “No, not even one hoof will be left behind.” Our families and all our possessions are to serve God. God performed countless miracles to save His people from the devil’s control. If we do not serve God, we become slaves to the devil. The Israelites remained slaves in Egypt; their enemies kept them in bondage. Slavery is bitter, and the burden grows heavier and heavier. Does this resemble our lives in this world? Today, many Christians’ lives burden them if they do not fully serve God. Satan will burden you more and more through this world. With slight pay increases, managerial positions, and shared ownership, Satan will attract you to serve him. However, God’s purpose in redemption is to save us. Our entire hearts, families, and possessions are meant to serve and worship Him.
- Ezekiel 44:10-11, 15-16** “.....But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, shall come near to me to minister to me, they shall approach my table.”
  - The Levites were chosen to serve God in His temple. Among the Levites, there were two categories: one was the descendants of Zadok, who came near to God to serve Him, standing before Him to carry out His commands, and ministering in the Most Holy Place. The other category of Levites strayed from God, following their idols. Therefore, they could only serve as

servants in the sacred area, caring for the temple gates and serving the people. They were both serving God, but in two different ways.

- In Verse 11, Service in the courtyard is a form of outer-court ministry. When the people come to offer sacrifices, you slaughter the cattle and sheep for them, standing before the people to serve them. Such service, applied to modern life, could be like leading people to accept Christ, to dedicate themselves to the Lord, and to give offerings to Him. Is this kind of service important? Yes, it is very important, but it is a service that is visible to people. This kind of service is lively and its results are very obvious—you slaughter a cow, and it's clear that a cow has been slaughtered. Similarly, if I lead five people and they all get baptized, it's something tangible and easy to see.
- The descendants of Zadok minister in the Holy of Holies. They are to guard the sanctuary, draw near to God, serve God, and stand before God. Their entire focus is on God, not on people. It is very dark in the sanctuary; although there is a lampstand, it is still very dim and has few people; it is a very lonely place. Also, drawing near to God and serving God is a big role: if you are not holy enough, you could be struck down. Standing before God means waiting for His commands; if He does not give commands, I will do nothing. This is what it means to stand before the Lord
- Today, Christians rarely practice standing before God. Often, they cannot wait for God to speak and act on their own instead, which is why churches are weak nowadays. A servant of God once said, "If God were to take the Holy Spirit up to heaven, many churches would continue as usual without any impact." Why? Because the co-workers in the church do not need to stand before God, to wait for His commands. Most of the time, we have already set our plans for the year, deciding what we will do and which activities to carry out.
- In the Old Testament, those serving in the sanctuary were required to wear linen garments, which prevented them from sweating. This signifies that service to God cannot rely on natural human strength. Sacrificing bulls and sheep requires physical strength, but this kind of effortless service is actually more challenging because you must stand before God, pouring out fat and blood before Him, serving near His table as commanded. That means standing ready until God gives instructions. Many people may grow impatient with standing before Him: "There are so many people outside waiting to offer sacrifices. Look at those cattle and sheep calling out. They need us to hurry and help slaughter them, but here we are, still standing before God." Is this service easy or hard? It's hard, but it's what pleases God the most.
- Today, in the New Testament, our bodies are the sanctuary. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. You can stand before Him at His table, serving Him, while simultaneously evangelizing, leading people to faith, and leading groups. These two things do not conflict.
- What does it mean to serve God, and what does it mean to serve the temple? Whether serving the temple or serving God, the focus isn't on what you do, but on the posture of your heart. For example, if we're preparing to visit someone, I might be thinking: Who should I visit after work today? What should I bring along? I need to finish work quickly to be there on time. My mind is occupied with these thoughts—that's serving the temple. But another person wakes up in the morning and draws near to the Lord: "Lord, my King! I am here to serve You, to worship You. I want to give You the worship and praise You deserve. Oh, I pour out my love upon You. And then, 'Lord, so-and-so has been struggling lately. May Your love overflow in me, so I can go and bless them greatly in Your name. Lord, be with me in a powerful way.'" This is serving God.

- Serving God means that whatever you do, your focus is on God. Your focus isn't on that person or that task. Even though you are doing these things and serving these people, you do it because of God, not out of obligation or duty. For example, if someone is sick, it's not because I'm the fellowship chair that I must visit them. Rather, I do it out of love for God, serving Him, and understanding His heart. It requires God to be with me. This is where the difference lies.

#### 4. **Luke 10:38-42: The Service of Mary and Martha**

- Many people create a false dichotomy, thinking that sitting at the Lord's feet is serving God, while cooking is serving the temple; but this is not true. Jesus rebuked Martha not for cooking, but for being anxious and troubled about many things, which led to complaining. Such service is not serving God; true service to God does not involve complaining.
- Apart from serving God and serving the temple, there is another kind of service—serving what your own flesh desires. Some say that Jesus could feed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish, so He didn't really need Martha's food, but Martha needed the applause. Some people are skilled and enjoy cooking for others, but while cooking, they suddenly notice others enjoying the meal without helping, and then they start to complain. That's not serving God; it's serving the temple.
- Being worried and troubled is something that requires spiritual warfare. Sometimes, these thoughts are beyond your control. I think some of us, when we draw near to the Lord, might think about things like "Later I need to lead the fellowship, how should I conduct the Bible study?" or "I have to lead worship, which songs should I choose?" Even a preacher may be troubled with similar thoughts, waking up every morning to draw near to the Lord, wondering what sermon to deliver. I say to the Lord, "Lord! My service belongs to You. I don't yet know what to say, but right now, my most important task is to serve You, to love You. I pour out my love upon You. Preaching is Your business; I won't let it weigh on my mind all day." We need this kind of practice. Whether your heart is in serving God or serving the temple makes a big difference.
- If we are not willing to come near His table, stand before Him, draw near to Him, and keep His commandments, although we may be busy doing church work and our feet are standing within the church, we are likely serving the temple rather than serving God. Paul understood this well, which is why he said in 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, "Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Paul was a man of vision, who knew his goal. Therefore, his running was purposeful, and his fighting was not in vain. He understood that his greatest enemy was himself. Why did he discipline his body and make it his slave? It was to prevent himself from being disqualified after preaching the gospel to others. Sometimes we become so busy serving God that we forget about God Himself.
- Paul's ministry was very busy, and he had extraordinary spiritual experiences. He was also well-versed in Scripture. So, even if he did not draw near to the Lord personally, he could still serve fruitfully, right? But Paul knew that despite his passionate efforts in preaching the gospel, establishing churches, and serving people, he only had one goal: to count everything as loss compared to gaining Christ. He considered everything he once thought beneficial as worthless compared to Christ. That means if his ministry would distract his heart, or make him so busy that his appetite for drawing near to God decreased, these things that could distract his heart

might seem good in the eyes of people, and even appear spiritual. But now, because of Christ, he considered them as having lost their worth.

- Serving God or serving the temple really isn't about what tasks you are doing but about the intent of our hearts. Many of our brothers and sisters, before it's their turn to perform, draw near to God. When it's their turn to perform, they go up and perform, and after finishing, they draw near to God again. So, every task can be very spiritual. We need to be mindful not to dive headfirst into serving, or get caught up in joyful activities, going from the Holy of Holies to the outer court, entering the sanctuary during meetings, and then running to the outer court after leaving the church. We need to practice serving Him throughout the day, with our thoughts, emotions, and attention all at His table, regardless of what we are doing.

5. **John 12:26** “ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

- Jesus said that the most important thing about serving is to follow Him. This is also mentioned in Ezekiel 44, which speaks about standing before Him, following Him, and keeping His commandments. This is the essence of serving God. Serving God is not about doing this or that for the Lord; rather, it is about following Him.
- There was a couple who had been serving the Lord full-time for several years but felt the need to further their education, so they went back to seminary. Pastor Grace asked them, "You must be very busy!" They replied, "Yes, I'm extremely busy because I have seminary assignments, and on weekends, I have to do church internships. It's really hectic! But honestly, if these services were taken away, I wouldn't know what to do!" This shows that our lives are fully engaged in serving the Lord. Even though we might complain about being busy, if these services were removed, we would feel lost and unsure of what to do with our lives. Many Christians who love the Lord start with a heart full of childlike passion and a burning desire to serve God. However, over time, the focus can become blurred. We begin to become busy serving others, organizing fellowship dinners, going on outings, and engaging in many activities.
- In 1989, we had 78 pastors who went to Korea together. On the last day, while giving testimonies, one pastor said, "When I first began serving the Lord, I often wept because of God's love. But after many years of service, my tears have been replaced by sweat, and as the sweat increased, the tears have ceased!" We need to pay attention to whether our tears have gradually dried up. Perhaps we question why tears are necessary. If our hearts are tender, it is easy to weep because of God's love and be moved by it. If we haven't shed tears for a long time, it is possible that our hearts have gradually hardened. We need to ask ourselves whether our lives are filled with work or filled with the Lord Himself. When we constantly say we are busy, are we truly busy with work or with the Lord? Two people may both be busy, but if their intentions differ, the outcomes will also be different. Only those who stand before God and allow His will to be carried out smoothly on earth can produce genuine service.

## 6. Conclusion

- Lawrence said, "Out of love for God, even bending down to pick up a blade of grass brings me

sweetness." When he was cooking in the kitchen for so many people, amidst the noise and constant requests for different dishes, he felt as if he were kneeling before the Lord, partaking in Communion. Nothing can obstruct our service to God, and no amount of busyness can prevent us from experiencing God's presence and obtaining God Himself.

- Paul was competent, well-versed in Scripture, experienced, and gifted. He could have been constantly pursued and bound by serving. But he was not. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." These were Paul's words in his old age. As he neared the end of his life, having established many churches, written numerous letters, and served many people, what remained in his heart? It was a longing for the appearance of Jesus. Even though his departure from this world was quite desolate, with many having left him and his companions gone, he did not think ill of them. Instead, he saw it as a journey to receive his reward and crown. What a victorious stance he took. So, brothers and sisters, we truly need to understand what our goal is.
- The founder of the Maria Fellowship, Shih Ning, said in her later years, "The greatest achievement of my life, my greatest accomplishment, is the fellowship I have established between myself and Jesus Christ." Her success was not measured by how many branches of the organization were established in countries, how many people came to faith, or how many books were published. Instead, she regarded her greatest accomplishment as having built a personal fellowship with Jesus. This should also be our life's pursuit. We need to ask ourselves what we are truly pursuing every day. Is our greatest joy found in the growth of our fellowship and church numbers, or is it in the increasing richness of Jesus' presence in our lives? Are we truly serving God, or are we serving the institution? If we draw near to Him, our ears will be opened to hear His commands. When we act on these commands, we will find that our service becomes effective and is remembered by God.
- In "The Final Battle," the prophet Jonah, upon reaching heaven, was told by other saints, "Let me tell you what will keep you on the path of life: it is to love your Savior and to seek only His glory. Do not seek your own glory. Everything you do to exalt yourself will one day bring terrible shame. But everything you do out of genuine love for the Savior, to honor His name, will expand the boundaries of His eternal kingdom and ultimately bring you a higher position." This refers to the fact that in heaven, there are high and low positions, and we should live for what is recorded in heaven, not for what is recorded on earth, as often what is honored on earth is a hindrance to being honored by the Lord in heaven. The values we hold are often reversed; what is exalted on earth may be the greatest barrier to being exalted in heaven, and what is looked down upon on earth may be honored in heaven. Many of our values need to be transformed. This aligns with biblical teachings: "Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it," and "Whoever wants to save their life will lose it." People look at outward appearances, but God looks at the heart. What He desires is our hearts, and He wants every Christian to serve Him with their whole heart and soul.

## Service 2 Questions

1. God said, "After you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship me on this mountain." What does "Egypt" symbolize? What is the purpose of God redeeming us from Egypt?
2. Brothers, is your whole heart dedicated to work, leaving only your wife to serve God? Sisters, is your entire focus on raising children, leaving only your husband to serve God? God says, "Not a hoof shall be left behind." Are your whole family and all your possessions dedicated to serving God? If not, what are your difficulties?
3. The Levites were chosen to serve God in the temple. How are the Levites divided into two groups? How does this impact their service?
4. In your service, do you often take matters into your own hands, acting before God speaks?
5. In the Old Testament, service in the sanctuary required wearing linen garments, and sweating was not allowed. What does this signify?
6. What is the difference between serving the temple and serving God?
7. Why did Jesus rebuke Martha?
8. Ask your coworkers: do you often complain during serving?
9. When you are too busy with life and burdened with service, do you forget God?
10. Is your life characterized by rushing into the holy of holies during worship and then quickly retreating to the outer court when you leave the church?
11. Paul was a person with a clear vision and purpose. His running was not aimless; his fighting and boxing were not in vain. What was his goal? Who was his enemy in the battle?
12. What did the founder of the Maria Fellowship, Shih Ning, say was her greatest achievement and

accomplishment in her later years?

13. What was Lawrence's feeling when he was cooking in the kitchen?

14. Quietly reflect before God: is there anything in your current serving that needs improvement?

15. Memorize: John 12:26, 1 Corinthians 9:26-27.