

## The Agitation of Servanthood

I was never clear if the story was true or if he was pulling our leg when a former professor told us of a congregational spokesman, who said to his preacher, "We'll do anything you can get us to do." We were never sure if we were supposed to smile or cringe. They say that most humor is amusing only because of the seed of truth from which it springs.

Needless to say, in a culture that celebrates individual freedom and autonomy, Americans don't receive many messages that celebrate playing the role of a servant. It was hardly any different in Jesus' world. His countrymen chafed under the yoke of Roman oppression. They longed for a *Messiah* who would free them. So, it had to be a bit disconcerting when a Man many hoped would prove to be that *Messiah* would say things like the following:

... <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 ... - Mark 10:42-44

The Apostles viewed leadership the same way, as did the "*Gentiles*" (the nation - the world - everybody and his dog). The idea was that the strong and powerful get to call the shots by virtue of their strength and power. One did not have to particularly like the arrangement to be reconciled to it. Such was pretty well the *status quo* in the ancient world as it has been ever since. But, God's kingdom works according to a different set of dynamics. Leadership in the church is determined by character, particularly, the character of a servant.

... <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." - Mark 10:45

Why did Jesus prefer to call Himself the "*Son of Man*" rather than the "*Messiah*" (or "Christ")? Both terms identified Him as the one of Whom the prophets had spoken, but it has been suggested that the lesser-used "*Son of Man*" designation had not become so muddled with all the grandiose and regal misconceptions that the people had attached to the term "*Messiah*." Little Jewish flags (more likely, palm branches) started waving in the heads of the masses whenever they heard the term "*Messiah*." Jesus had to teach them meekness so He called Himself "*Son of Man*." It was no less of a term to describe the One to come, but it did trigger less jingoism.

Jesus hadn't come to be served. He hadn't come to sit on a throne. He hadn't come to be just one more of those "dime-a-dozen" potentates that had marched across the stage of human history. He had come to serve. Indeed, He had come to die as a "*ransom*" for sinners.

<sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death -  
even death on a cross! - Philippians 2:5-8