

Paul Lawler: Hi, this is Paul Lawler and I'm with Al Henson, the founder of The Compassionate Hope Foundation. And this is Sage Talk. Al, it's a pleasure to be with you today and-

Al Henson: It's good to be with you too, Paul and back again with our listeners.

Paul Lawler: Absolutely and I feel that way as well and as we have this privilege of spending time together, our topic today is, what is a servant and taking on the nature of a servant. And as we dive into this topic, I've noted this several times, but we both have and share a global perspective because we both have the honor and privilege of serving in different parts of the world.

Al Henson: Yeah, if you love Jesus and follow Him, you have to love the nations and He'll lead you out among them in some way, somehow.

Paul Lawler: Amen and that's such a true statement and I think it's important for us all to be reminded of that. But I was in Asia not too long ago and I was invited to be a part of a conference taking place there. And the pastor that organized this conference is a very influential pastor in that part of the world. And I just observed something that I thought was so unique. He convened these pastors, he brought in speakers from different parts of the world and this particular pastor, even though he was the convener, loved and admired by many, not once was he on the platform. In fact, not only was he not on the platform, the entire conference, he sat on the back row.

Al Henson: Wow.

Paul Lawler: I noticed at times when, during the teaching, he might have his head bowed in prayer just interceding for his fellow pastors. And what I was captured by was this heart of a servant, as he was serving the body of Christ, serving his fellow pastors. And, Al, what struck me is that's such a contrast from what I often experience, see, and maybe even battle at times as a North American pastor. So it's with that in mind, you and I talked about a Bible verse earlier today, Isaiah 42 verse 1 and it reads like this, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations." Would you mind commenting on that?

Al Henson: Yes, Paul, the subject of being a servant, many books are being written about the subject. It's now almost always a part of any kind of leadership conference. And what is interesting to me is your story, is that even though there's a lot of theology and knowledge about being a servant, it's impossible to become a servant liken to Jesus unless actually Jesus Himself is with the Holy Spirit, controlling our very inner being and its motives and we're spiritually minded, we're walking in the spirit. It's easy to be religiously minded and the carnal flesh be doing a lot of good things. And so just a good foundation as we begin to talk about Christ is this verse because this is God presenting his own son, Jesus, as the servant of God.

I always think it's important to start with God and when we think about the subject of being a servant, we have the Godhead, we have the triune God, God the father, God the son, God the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons. And as I have understood this in developed in my growth and understanding the trinity, even though it's far beyond comprehension, is that the Godhead has a will. And the Father holds sacred the will of the Godhead and He declares the will of the Godhead. So that's why even Jesus, when he comes, says, "I do my father's will." And even taught us to pray, "Our father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy will." The will is the will of the father declaring the will of the Godhead.

But God the Father holds that. The son then, as Isaiah 42 is speaking about, He is the servant of the Godhead. He is the one that carries out the will of the Godhead declared and held sacred by God the father. So that's why Colossians in the New Testament, in places will teach us that Jesus actually is the creator because this was the will of the Godhead, the world of the father. And so Jesus carried it out and then the third part of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, is the one that empowers. The servant of the Godhead, Jesus.

So when Jesus walked upon the earth, he was conceived of the spirit. I think even in the womb, he was perhaps filled with the spirit and then even as he began his earthly ministry in Matthew 5 it says, "And being filled with the spirit, he went up into the wilderness." And then even Jesus in John 5:19 says, "I could do nothing of myself. So I saw the father move, there is my commitment to his will. I saw the father moving and then I moved with him." The other texts, he moved with the father carrying out the will of the father and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul Lawler: You know, Al, as you share this from the Revelation scripture, I'm mindful that in our own context here in North America, in the news the last couple of years or several years, we've heard some things about pastors and leaders that really don't reflect having the heart of a servant. Now, I recognize that could be true of pastors and leaders in other parts of the world as well. But I'm mindful that this, what you're describing is such a contrast of some of what we see among Christian leaders. Could you share a comment on that?

Al Henson: Yeah, there's obviously, Paul, we're all aware of this and it appears that even the news media now want to make sure that they magnify these stories. And again, I want to say that I wouldn't mention names here, but we love these brothers and we thank God that the grace of God is there as it has been in our own lives when we make mistakes and failures, so we love them. But these kinds of things are indications that we have many in Christian leadership that have not understood, if you want to be conformed to the image of Christ, as your being conformed to his image, you will become a servant and servant is more than just what you do. It's why you do it and how you do it.

It's not just the obedience, but by carrying it out in the spirit in you establish both the heart and motives of God in how you serve. And Jesus, when he was

upon the earth, ending his time with his disciples in John chapter 20 and 21, very powerful conversation with him and his disciples when he said unto them, "Now as the father, as the father has sent me, now so send I you." And then now so send I, as the father is exactly in the same manner and the same way as the father sent me, now so send I you. So the servant was sent to walk among fallen humanity, Christ and as he walked among fallen humanity, he came to serve not only the will of God, but the need of mankind.

He was fully the servant, the greater served the lesser, us. And in that same text then you see after he had said, "As the father has sent me, so send I you." He breathed upon them, representing the breathing or the breath of God, the Holy Spirit and said unto them, "Welcome the Holy Spirit." They were saying, the same way as I've carried out as a servant, the will of God. Now I want you to carry out, as a servant, God's will, your Lord, Messiah's will. You are the lights of the earth. You are the salt of the earth, so you will become living epistles as Paul would say, of servants, energized and empowered by the Holy Spirit. One of the ways I express that, Paul is this, Jesus came to die and through his death, burial and resurrection, he birth the gospel.

Now in the same way, we must die. He said deny self, take up the cross, which is an instrument of death. The cross is what puts self to death on a moment by moment basis and then you can follow me. That's the resurrection. This was the core message of Jesus to his disciples. If you want to be my disciple, you must deny self, take up the cross and follow me. And so as he died to birth the gospel, then as we die daily, as Paul would say, in Christ, then we, through death and resurrection into the spirit, we proclaim the gospel. Listen, this is really important, proclaiming the gospel. You cannot speak and proclaim by word of mouth the gospel that you're not first living.

Paul Lawler: That's right, yes.

Al Henson: It will have no power and this is what we have often in the kingdom. We have those who are proclaiming the good news of Jesus, but their lives do not demonstrate the gospel and the purest look into the gospel is a servant, one moved by God's love or moved by God's wisdom.

Paul Lawler: You know, Al, I'm going to come back and just reference the American church and I'm aware she's a church that has a lot of activity. But this comes to mind. Great activity can be a camouflage for great iniquity. And I know that sounds a little, maybe a little edgy to say that, but it seems in light of what you're saying and sharing and what the scriptures teach, that that servanthood, taking on the nature of a servant, you were commenting a moment ago, it's not just what we do, it's the spirit in which we do what we do. That it seems that there's something that for some of us is lost. And that is getting back to this nature of servanthood.

Al Henson: Yeah, always a good question is, what moves you? And what moved Jesus to servanthood was love. The love for God, love for the father, and love for humanity. And in that love, and when you think of practically how this works out, I'll just share a personal testimony as a pastor. I was trained to think of a vision of becoming a champion for Christ.

Paul Lawler: Yes, that was the school you went to correct?

Al Henson: Yes, I was trained in that kind of way and there was nothing wrong with being visionary. And there's nothing wrong with knowing that we can all be in Christ, champions. But even though I was desiring to walk out in the spirit, which I was doing at some level, there also was a carnal part of me that really embraced that, yes, I want to be somebody. I want to be recognized in the kingdom. And so there was some ripping and tearing and death that needed to take place in me. But I remember, after planting a church and that I felt our church was waning a bit.

So I thought, "Oh, I need to have another vision message." And I thought, "I'll do this on a Sunday night because that's the group, [inaudible 00:13:57] to come on Sunday night. The key leaders and those who really love the church and love the Lord will come out on Sunday night." So I had labored for a couple of two or three days really putting this message together, even passionate about it, burdened about it, burdened about the church. And I actually told my wife, Susan, I want to have lunch and then I'm going to go back to the church and just study and pray.

So I went back to the church at 2:00 and there from say 2:00 to 5:30 or so, studying and then decided I was finished. Actually, probably a little proud and I'm ready now. I'm going to turn it loose with the congregation. And so I knelt to pray, got prostrate before the Lord. I didn't hear the audible voice of God, but the still quiet inner thoughts of God, "Son, what do you think you're doing?" And I thought I would hear, "Son, well done." "Son, what do you think you're doing?" And I knew enough to stop then and my father wanted to talk to me about something, my heavenly father.

Over the course of the next few minutes, 30, 40 minutes it became really clear to me that I wasn't going to bring a message of a servant. I was going to bring a message of a leader that wanted to see his church grow, his church grow and his ministry grow. And I was going to call the people of God into his vision and God began to rip my heart out, "Son, what are you doing? Why are you doing this?" And so in that hour, I repented, another time of brokenness in my life. And I went out that night and I delivered this message.

The message was, "You're all priceless treasures. You've all been born of God and God has a purpose and plan for your life and this pastor has come to serve you. And I want to know who you are and God's purpose and plan for your life and how can that fit in for all of us, collectively, together, together have the

vision of God and how can I help you to succeed at what God has called you to do." And it just, that really changed my pastoral ministry.

Paul Lawler: Yeah, that is so powerful. You know, Al, as you shared that, a thought that occurs to me, that one of the ways that we would know we've moved out of taking on the heart of a servant is when we get more fascinated with the what, than the who. When we're more fascinated with the activity or the results and I mean results that are really more about our carnal nature than we are captivated by Christ himself.

Al Henson: Yes and this picture of Christ as this beautiful servant. It's Philippians 2 and what amazes me is that the God of the universe would come and serve us and become our servant. And this is what Philippians 2 calling us, "Let this mind be in you." Philippians 2:5. The same attitude in you, "Which was in Christ Jesus." And then began to proceed about what was in his mind. And his mind was, he was God, being in the form of God, thought it not rather to be equal with God, but he made of himself no reputation. And if you really understand what he's saying, he who is God had the rights of deity and to come to the earth, he had the right to say to all humanity, "Serve me, bow before me and do what I tell you to do." He stripped himself of all of his rights, not of his deity.

He remained God, but he laid down all of his rights because in his own mind he summed up that he loved God, the father and what God, the father desired was to be reconciled to his creation. Creator to creation and what humanity, he saw in humanity enslaved in sin and humanity needed to be forgiven of that sin and set free from that sin, so that it could come into Christ and be the righteousness of Christ and be reconciled to God. And he said, "Loving God and loving mankind is a higher priority than my own rights as deity." So he stripped himself of all of that and just said, notice the words, and he became a man.

And it says, "And then he became the servant of man and then he served man not only washed their feet, but he served man even unto death and he served man even unto the death of the cross, not an honorable death, but in accursed death." So he ultimately served to the ultimate and that is laying everything down, even his reputation, his own honor and where he was rejected and reviled of man, Isaiah 53 will say. And when I beheld such love, such beauty, and as God was revealing that to my heart, I thought, "That's what I want to be, Lord. That's what you want me to be, to live in this kind of way."

Paul Lawler: You know, Al, as you shared that, I'm aware that you have a story of something you experienced in Asia and that illustrates this so well. Would you mind sharing that?

Al Henson: Yes, I'd be glad to. Before I do that, I just want to say this, is that as a pastor you think about how do I serve the people? Not, how do they serve me? As a husband, how do I serve my wife? Children are born, how do I serve my children? And you esteem them better than yourselves and you put their

interests before your own. This is love and the thoughts of love and so I was teaching this matter of being a servant in an undisclosed country. But there was about 50 brothers and sisters that were present, 40 brothers, 10 sisters for about three days.

And we talked about a servant, some of these same things, only we took about 13 to 14 hours of studying and prayer to look into these things. And it was just wonderful to see what God was doing in the hearts of these brothers as they were understanding. But God had put it upon my heart at the end to do the final lesson just for 10 minutes on the washing of the feet. When Jesus washed their feet. And I knew the culture, that the male was esteemed high and the female was seen as something less than the male. And so I chose an elderly man, who was one of the spiritual leaders to wash his feet first. And even when I began that, they began to think, "How can this be? White America, that the highly esteemed Dr. Al and now he's washing our feet."

So the spirit began to reveal to them more at the heart level, what we'd been teaching. Then I took the youngest brother among us, which was even more, "Oh, how can he do this?" And then thirdly, I took one of the pastor's wives, "Oh, a female." And I washed her feet and when I was washing her feet, I would have a translator beside me and each one as I was, I would just bless them and speak a blessing over them. And then finally God had put it upon my heart, there was a young lady who had been working in the kitchen all these three days, cooking and serving. She wasn't a leader in the church, but she had come and served us. And I asked that they bring her out and I washed her feet.

Paul Lawler: Wow.

Al Henson: And Paul, it was hot with the presence of God, the revelation of God. Then something that would probably be one of the top three or four moments of my entire walk with God happened. Very humbling, but very holy. The leader's wife came forward and was whispering in the leader's ear. And then the leader came over and the translator said, "My wife said last night at 3:00 God woke her out of her sleep." So he was thinking about a servant and he said to her, "Tomorrow, Brother Al, your servant, my servant will wash your feet, don't you let him out of here without you washing his feet."

And they asked, "Can we wash your feet?" And I actually for a few moments was hesitant and I thought, "Well, that's pride, but I need to let them do this. I need to let them honor me and honor the Lord." And so I did, and I was fighting back the tears. The place was so holy. I was thinking of the verse even in Philippians 2 where because he'd humbled himself, "Wherefore God highly exalted him." And one of the paradoxical principles of God, if we humble ourselves, he will exalt us in due time, in his way and his timing. Then Paul, an unspeakable thing almost happened, I'm hesitant to speak of it. But four or five ladies gathered around and the men gathered around as if they all wanted to be, even though they couldn't touch my feet, they wanted to wash my feet or be a part of that.

The leading lady, whose hair was bundled up, she took her long hair down. And she began to dry my feet, weeping. I could feel the tears, it was a matter of love and a matter of honor. And it was in that, that I really began to understand the joy that was there. The fulfillment that was there and as the commercial would say, now this is priceless. And I really thought in that moment, everything I've given up, I've given up nothing and I really have gained everything. And so I just like an ending to challenge any brother, sister, any Christian leader that is living in the way of Jesus, is the only real way. And if you're going to be like Jesus, you must be a servant in every relationship and every calling in your life.

Paul Lawler:

Al, that is so good and I'm mindful as we as we hear this, that this also is a great bridge for what we're going to talk about in our next episode. We're going to talk about the subject of brokenness and how brokenness actually lays the foundation for blessing in the heart of a servant's life. So we hope those that are listening today will be with us again next week as we fellowship together and also share. But let's pray as we close today for just the development of a servant's heart in the lives of those listening today. Let's pray.

Father, as we've been reminded today, Jesus himself left the heavenly realm and became like us in the context of taking on humanity, the form of a servant and he served us. He served the father. He served us and God, as you are working to conform us to the image of the son, we pray, cultivate in us, cultivate in me, oh God the nature of the servant heart that Jesus possessed. So Jesus, we pray, possess us, fill us, dwell in us. We want know Jesus Christ, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings in taking on the nature of a servant. We pray this in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Al Henson:

Amen.