

# Servant Leadership

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Scripture: Philippians 2:5-11

# 57

Can anyone guess why we have the number 57 on the screen to start the sermon this AM?  
You might know if you did the reading...

There were not 57 disciples – only 12 of those  
It was 40 years that the Hebrews were in the desert – not 57  
So what's with 57?

**57 is the number of times that the word SERVANT is used in the New Testament.**

The book we are going through, this week, talks about SERVANT leadership.

*The whole idea of being a servant must be pretty important if it is mentioned 57 times.*

We know that every age and culture has status symbols...that make others declare “Wow, that person is successful. That person is CLIMBING the ladder of success.”

Right now for 2016 the latest status symbols are

Swanky stollers ( you can spend 3,000 dollars and up on the really good ones complete with an outlet for your phone), fine wines, high end bikes (up 15%), designer wear, latest technology, fast cars, frequency of travel, and having a high end pet (certain



breeds especially of dog  
).are some of the latest status symbols for 2015.

In the ancient world of course...you didn't have technology, and you didn't have cars ... but...  
you never got more status conscious than in Roman Culture.

**“Rome was the most hierarchical status conscious culture EVER”** writes one historian...

In order to understand this passage in Philippians where our text is from this morning... you have to understand the kind of place Philippi was

*People in Philippi lived and breathed what rung of the ladder you were on...(IMAGE OF LADDER)*

It was a vertical society...a ladder climbing place...

So let me briefly give you a little history –

Many years prior to Paul’s writing the letter to the Philippians there was this guy who ruled in Macedonia.

At that time Philippi didn’t even exist...This ruler’s name was named **Philip of Macedonia**....(so guess who Philippi is named after, right?) ... and Philip was so rich that he created a city inside of Macedonia – which was the city of Philippi - in which to keep all of his gold...

*Can you imagine being that rich that you need a whole city to contain your gold? That’s a status symbol for you!*

So you can imagine...the town of Philippi was a very rich elite town...

Two centuries later...

Caesar Augustus comes to power and defeats rulers, Casius and Brutus at Philippi

And historians will tell you that..

**The battle at Philippi was the beginning of the Roman Empire**

“Caesar is Lord” the people would declared in Philippi...”That is the good news.”

Philippi is also where emperor worship started...where Caesar became Lord of all...

Polycarp...one of the early church fathers...at 86 years old was burned at the stake because he said this **“For 86 years I have followed Christ and he has never failed me...I will not say Caesar is Lord...for how can I betray Jesus who is Lord?”** so they burned him... at the stake

The elite people in Philippi were Roman Citizens. Philippi was where Rome began and the culture had its roots...

And what was Roman culture like?

**Roman culture was**

**vertical, and hierarchical**; all about climbing up ladders

**Philippi was extremely preoccupied with**

**Status, recognition and power**....Aren’t you glad in Silicon Valley, we don’t live in a culture that is that way?

In Rome there was a social system that was

just like a ladder...

People were divided quite rigidly into classes.

There was the **Roman Senate** at the very top – which were about 600 people who had power in the government...

And then just under that, was the **Equestrian class**. These were people of great wealth and power too. You belonged to this class if you were prominent enough to receive a horse out of public funds.

Beneath that was the **Decurion class**. These people were still wealthy, but not as wealthy as the Equestrians; however, they had some power in local government

Beneath the Decurion class were the **Citizens**. They had less wealth, but had some rights as Romans like owning their own property.

Below that were those who were called “**Free people**.” These were people who had been Slaves, but somewhere along the line had acquired enough resources to buy their freedom. They were still not Citizens.

**Slaves** occupied the lowest rung on the ladder.

Everything in Roman society reinforced this kind of caste system. Clothes showed what class you were in too.

In ancient Rome, only Citizens were allowed to wear a togas. Togas were drafty, and uncomfortable because you had to wear one hand in and one hand out...but people wore them any way just to show their status...

The **Decurions**

and **Equestrians** could wear **stripes on their togas** to show their status.

If you were a **slave**, you

wore a **tunic**—you didn’t get to wear a toga—just as a reminder that this was your class.

In addition, much of Roman life was arranged around Guilds that had wealthy patrons from the Equestrian class.

The guilds frequently held festivals.

*If you went to a meal at a festival, you were seated acc’d to your status*

If you were to the right of the host...you were first...Left you were second the Equestrian class was served first, and after that, the Decurion class.

Of course, the best food went first.

Next the Citizens would be fed, and then Free people would be fed. *If you were a Slave, and if there were anything left, you would get the dregs.*

Seating at public events was arranged by status also...

It wasn’t about how expensive your ticket was

No...public arenas had areas marked off for your status... this lower group goes to this section and this higher group to a better section...and you better not get your sections mixed up

It was so bad that even  
When people were buried in Philippi... they had their titles on their tombstones  
So your status followed you even to the grave!!

That's the way that it worked in Philippi. That was life.  
But there was a new community – the early church - and they said to themselves:  
Jesus didn't really deal with people like that. Jesus said that he “**Came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for all.**” (Mark 10:45)

So let's say you are a Slave – that's your status - and you go into a house where the early church gathers, and *an Equestrian kneels down and serves you food.*

What do you do with that? You start to cry. You're a Slave.  
*You've never been served your whole life long, and now you're being served by an Equestrian!*  
You're getting the best food first.  
You look in his eyes, and you're weeping; and he's weeping, because he's never experienced the bond of common humanity or the joy of serving someone before. There's never been a community like this in the ancient world!

The early church turned Roman culture upside down...and did the opposite of what everyone else was doing...

Instead of trying to get to the top of the ladder in your particular class

The early Christians went down the ladder...

The idea of anyone humbling themselves did not exist  
The goal of Roman life was to climb up this ladder

So here comes Paul  
And he begins...to preach  
Jesus is Lord. We are supposed to be like him...(At the time the common phrase was Caesar is Lord, so this Jesus is Lord was very dangerous...)  
It means Caesar is NOT Lord  
Very scary thing to do

Well.... guess who  
Most of the early church was made up of? (IMAGE OF LADDER WITH ARROW AT BOTTOM RUNG)

*It was made up of the people down here...on the bottom of the ladder...that people nobody cared about*

How could Paul describe to these people...down here...that God loved them?  
In this status conscious area, where your worth was dependent on what rung you were on...  
how could Paul get across to them that they had value and worth  
that they were still God's children...and didn't matter what rung of the ladder they were on....huge challenge for him...

Let's read the Philippians passage in unison...which we read before but now we read understanding a little bit more about the context...and we can see ...what God in Christ is willing to do for us...

**<sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

**Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:**

**<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature<sup>[a]</sup> God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature<sup>[b]</sup> 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! *(leave up a moment)***

Jesus starts way up here...no higher could he be on the cosmic ladder...he was in very nature God

And then Jesus starts to come down the ladder

Lower and lower....Still lower

Takes off his toga

Remember...No one humbled themselves in Philippi...no one did that

Then it says Jesus became obedient...to death...that obedience thing was slave language...

And then...what?

Even death on a cross....gone as low as you can go

Cause death on a cross was

Particularly reserved for slaves...to make it as excruciated and shameful as possible...

Citizens were not to be crucified (Paul comment)

Jesus could go....No lower than this....

Jesus went

As low as the lowest person who ever lived had ever gone

Bc Jesus did this thing

God exalted him....Let's read it together...

**Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.**

Your benefactor, in Roman culture, if you had one

Could honor you and lift you up out of one status category

And put you way up at the top

If Caesar was your benefactor it was a great thing cause you'd be exalted very high....  
But this was God...who was higher than Caesar...and Jesus was exalted to the highest place  
No one higher than this  
That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow  
In heaven....and earth and under the earth...and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord  
Jesus is Lord  
Jesus is Lord...not a CEO...Not president of US  
Not a rock star...movie star...not Caesar  
Jesus alone is Lord  
Because Jesus alone reveals to us  
Who God is...  
And we find that as we look at Jesus  
In this tremendous act of downward mobility  
That it is the nature of our God to serve and sacrifice himself for us...  
And that...like it or not...this is who we are called to be like IN THE CHURCH TODAY!...

Paul starts this letter to the Philippians diffitly than most of his letter...usually he writes at the beginning Paul an apostle of JC...here he writes

**Paul and Timothy...servants/ slaves of Christ Jesus**

He is identifying fully with the nature and purpose of Jesus

Elsewhere Paul writes that we are  
Citizens of heaven....and he says live in a manner worthy of a citizen of heaven  
He uses this term because it was real impt to be a citizen in Rome...  
You had special privileges, you were among the elite

I used wonder why Paul was always writing from prison if he were a Roman Citizen.

Why it was that he didn't tell the authorities hey, you can't imprison me or flog me without a trial.

Historians tell us that Paul actually, even though he was a Roman Citizen with all the perks of that

He rarely used it to avoid suffering or imprisonment because he wanted to take on the same sufferings of the common people in the church most of whom were slaves, so that he could identify with *them*.

And also so that he would be an example for them of how there were no distinctions in the Body of Christ.

Can you imagine taking the flogging – usually 40 lashes minus one – with led in the leather whip – to make this point?

You could have gotten out of it if you had pulled your trump card of being up the ladder a few more notches...but Paul chose to be a servant.

So Paul talks a great deal about being a citizen of heaven – not of Rome!

Paul is saying...

When you are a citizen of heaven, you get that we're all in the same boat

Those with the togas...who are tempted to climb

And the Slaves...who are nobody...

That's the way it is when you're a citizen of heaven – we are servants all of us for the living God, and thereby we are servants of one another.

And Paul says, **“act like citizens of heaven where the playing field is all level”**  
**No one is superior to anyone else...and**

Citizens of heaven know that there is  
No task is too humble for us to do..cause we aren't even thinking about ourselves or our status in church...  
we are thinking of Jesus...  
How he emptied himself for us...and we remember him for it and we do what he did...  
Jesus went all the way down the ladder...to serve us...to accommodate to our condition...so that we could experience his love...and grace...and forgiveness

I am sure that today wherever you work  
Or go to school, or train, there are ladders to climb  
Unfortunately we even climb ladders in church at times, and decide in subtle ways who is in, who is out, who is a better Christian...who has more power in the church...who gets what they want and who doesn't

In this congregation there are a lot of gifts  
You've got intelligence, resources, you are networked in  
But if you use what you've got to ladder climb for your own gain  
It won't work out for you in the end

You'll become obsessed and preoccupied...you'll be a citizen of this world  
Citizens of heaven do the opposite  
they go down down, down;  
until they  
Find someone who is suffering and they accommodate to that person, lift their burdens in Jesus name...When we do this....our own hearts are lifted up...

That's what this church community here at WVPC is all about... ....our symbol, our focus is the cross....the excruciating cross way down at the base of this ladder...

It reminds us that we follow a God who will go all the way down to save us...a God who is not afraid to be hurt for our sake

Not afraid to be vulnerable...not afraid to become like us in our broken condition....

And a God who says to us “citizens of heaven...who are not of this world.....servants/slaves of the most high God...be an expert, a specialist in learning downward mobility, and become servants of one another”. AMEN