

Putting Others First : Going Beyond Singing Joy To The World , During This Christmas And New Year Series

Contributed by **Dr. Madana Kumar, Phd** on **Dec 27, 2020**

Scripture: Romans 15:1-3, Philippians 2:1-4, John 10:10, Matthew 25:40, Matthew 25:45, Matthew 20:28, John 13:1, Galatians 6:2

Denomination: Evangelical/Non-Denominational

Summary: This is the time when we sing Joy to the world and be happy about it. But is there something more we are expected to do? Before the Christmas Spirit wears off and before New Year resolutions are made, let us commit to Put others First

Putting Others First

Romans 15:1-3, Philippians 2:1-4

This morning, permit me to ask you to do an exercise. Please do pardon me if you feel uncomfortable doing this exercise. We have distributed a piece of paper and pens to all of you. I would like you to think for a moment and write down all the things you did during the Christmas Season this year. It might be baking a cake, it might be buying cloths, it might be decorating the church, or home or whatever. Think and write down please.

If you have finished writing it down, go through the list and put a tick mark on the items that were done for others. If you baked the cake for the family, it counts. If you bought cloths for your wife it doesn't count (I am kidding, it does) . Now, look through the ticked items and identify what you did for your immediate family, immediate relatives, and put another tick mark against the items you did for people outside your family circle. Now sit back and reflect on the items that have the double tick marks.

The Christmas celebrations are over and we are waiting for the New Year celebrations now. The secular world has increasingly started calling this the "Holiday Season". On this intervening Sunday between Christmas and the New year, the Lord has placed on my heart to examine some of Jesus's teachings and how it is meant to make a difference in the way we deal with others.

But before we go there, let us understand why we need to look at this topic during this season of all. After all, this is a season of Joy, and we would just be celebrating, isn't it? Why not focus on the promises of God? Why not focus on the Joy that this season brings to all the world? Why not sing the Carol "Joy to the World" and be happy about it? Let me tell you, JOY is the exact reason why I am speaking on this topic today. The best expansion of JOY that I have heard is this. Jesus First, Others Next , You last. JOY. So, during this season, I believe that, for us to be really joyful, we need to go with this understanding of JOY. Jesus First, Others Next and You last.

Let us look at Jesus First concept of JOY. Pastor has been speaking about it for some time now. For us Christians, there is no denying the fact that the reason for the Season is Jesus Christ, and it is His birth we are celebrating. We celebrate Christmas because we believe in the Scripture, we believe in the virgin birth and we believe in the man Jesus Christ, who walked the earth among us for 33 years. We believe in the cross where He was crucified for our sins, we believe in the resurrection and we believe in His

second coming. There is no doubt that we are here, because we put Jesus First. If there is anyone who has not yet put their faith in Jesus completely yet, this is the right Season for us to do that.

Let us turn to the second and third aspects of JOY. Others first, You last.

All of you know that I teach Servant Leadership in corporates, outside the Churches and Christian Organisations. That is my passion, that is my mission and that is my livelihood. So, when people ask me to define a Servant Leader, I give them this definition. "A Servant Leader is someone who invests in the life of another person to the extent that the other person becomes better, bigger, wiser, richer, healthier, happier wealthier, more famous than themselves." All participants in my workshops are impressed by this definition of Servant Leadership, but soon the "Practical aspects" of this definition starts raising its head. Does it mean that I will need to promote my direct report to be my manager? Does it mean that I give an increment to my team member that his/her salary becomes double that of mine? Practical questions. So for the corporate crowd, I do have a practical definition, and I do provide a practical definition, so that they don't get put off by the ideal definition of Servant Leadership that I had articulated above.

I want to ask you this morning. How about us, who believe in Jesus Christ? How about us who are faithful Christians, and church goers? Do we need a practical definition too? Do we also think that the definition that I gave is too ideal to practice? As Christians, are we really required to Put Others First?

Let us turn to the Bible for some answers this morning. Philippians 2:3-4 (NKJV) tells us 3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. The message is clear. We should not be selfish, and need to look at the interest of others. It might sound rather rhetorical to speak on this topic, but think again? Do we always have the interest of others in our mind when we pray, when we testify, when we do things, when we give? Go back to the list that we prepared in the beginning of the sermon and look at it again. Are we there yet? My objective is not make us feel guilty or uncomfortable but to learn from this season about what Jesus asked us to do. Let us go back two verses from Philippians 2:3-4 and go to first two verses. Philippians 2:1-2 (NKJV) 1 Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Before Paul asks us to put others first in verse 3, he starts by asking us to examine ourselves. He says, if we have any consolation in Christ, if we have any comfort in live, if we have any fellowship with the Holy spirit. We keep saying Christ is the reason for the season isn't it? We keep asserting that love is the message of Christmas, and sitting on this side of the cross we do want the fellowship of the Holy Spirit isn't it? Paul says, if we have any of that, we need to show love like Jesus did. We need to show love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Let us look at another passage by Paul. Romans 15:1-3 (NKJV) 1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." Christian life is not about "doing as you please". Christian life is about bearing the weaknesses of others, helping others, edifying others, even willing to take the "reproaches of those who reproach God, on us". So many times, in my work and ministry I feel indignant and angry when others do not match up to my strengths. I have to be constantly reminded that I have weakness too and I am called to bear the weaknesses of others. God stops me in my tracks

and reminds me about this every day. One of the discussions that is ongoing all over the world, and especially in Christian Circles is the question of whether we should wear a mask. I know that there is difference of opinion on this even inside our own small congregation. Without getting into a controversy, let me suggest; when we are faced with this question, this debate, let us look at it in the context of Romans 15:1-3. Is our stand on wearing or not wearing mask dependent on what "pleases self" or is it based on "edifying others"? I will leave it at that. I know each of us will have our own answers to that.

But let us come to the crux of this passage. We need to do this because of Romans 15:3. Christ did not please himself, but went to the extent of bearing the sins of everyone when he went on the cross. This is an undeniable truth. We cannot miss the focus on others that Jesus had. He made it clear that He came so that others will have abundant life (John 10:10). You remember the first aspect of JOY? It is Jesus first. But here is the catch. Jesus gives us one way of putting Him first. In Matthew 25:40 (NKJV) , after describing the Judgment scenario, Jesus tells us. 40 And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' He re-affirms it in Matthew 25:45 (NKJV) 45 Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' These two should make it clear to us that the way to put Jesus first is by putting others' need before our own. Jesus left no doubt in our minds when he explicitly clarified Matthew 20:28 (NKJV) 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." . He washed the feet of his disciples , including the one who He knew was going to betray Him, to demonstrate and set an example for His own teaching. John records at the beginning of this feet washing incident why Jesus did that; John 13:1 (NKJV) 1 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. . Some other translations put it as He showed them the true extend of his love. It was Jesus' way of showing to the world what he meant by loving your neighbor as yourselves, by putting others first.

So you see, Putting Others First is not a suggestion, it is a rule. It is a "law of Christ", as Galatians 6:2 (NKJV) puts it. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Let me end with a true story.

(Show Kevin Carter's Pulitzer Prize winning photograph of a Sudanese child and a vulture, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_vulture_and_the_little_girl#/media/File:Kevin-Carter-Child-Vulture-Sudan.jpg)

I don't know how many of you have seen this picture before. This is a picture taken by photographer Kevin Carter in 1993. This is a picture of a famine stricken Sudanese child who was trying to reach the UN feeding center just half a mile away. The child (initially published as a girl, but later believed to be a boy) was exhausted and could not carry on and the vulture was waiting for its feed. Kevin took the picture and the picture was published in the New York Times. The horror of the famine that was prevalent in Sudan came alive through this picture and this picture alone brought international attention to the situation in Sudan and significantly increased the donations for relief work in Sudan. Kevin Carter went on to receive the Pulitzer prize for this picture. But the story does not end there. Questions were asked about what did Kevin do actually, after clicking the picture. It is reported that he remarked to his wife that he did chase away the vulture. Yes, chase away the vulture but left the child where he was. Kevin did not think it was necessary, or possible for him to help the child reach the feeding center. The

situation in Sudan was very volatile and they had limited time it seems and their priority was to click photographs. That was the job that Kevin was charted for. So he did his job and certainly was rewarded handsomely for the great job he did. No one really knows for sure whether the boy survived or did really reach the feeding center finally. Kevin certainly did not know. The guilt and the horror of what he saw and what he did not do, weighed heavily on Kevin Carter and he committed suicide four months after receiving the Pulitzer prize.

This is a sobering story for us to remember this holiday season. In our hurry to celebrate the season, in our business of celebrating and singing Joy to the world, have we missed someone's urgent need? In our eagerness to do a great job at what we have been assigned to do, have we missed noticing the need of another person? In our eagerness to protest against the restrictions we have had through the year about gathering, corporate worship etc, have we missed actions that could edify others? When we testify to the Lord's faithfulness in healing us of a disease, or giving us a promotion at work, or helping us get through a difficult situation, or providing for us miraculously when we needed it the most, or whatever it is that we praise God for, have we paused and considered what did I do with that blessing to others?

I love this quote from Martin Luther. "If there is anything good in us, it is not our own, it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift then it is entirely a debt one owes to love. And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself. Thus my learning is not my own, it belongs to the unlearned and is the debt I owe to them. My wisdom belongs to the foolish, my power to the oppressed. My wealth belongs to the poor, my righteousness to the sinner. For these are the forms of God of which we must empty ourselves in order to be a servant. It is with all these qualities that we must stand before God and intervene on behalf of those who do not have them."

Jesus tells us that He came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many. He says that He came so that others might have abundant life. He says that whatever we do for the least of these brethren we do it for Him. Before the spirit of Christmas wears off this year, and before the new year begins, shall we make a commitment to the Lord that we will Put Others First?

Let us pray.