Serving

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[0:00] So our theme tonight is serving. You'll have seen, as I've mentioned, that around the edge of the church are different tables with different name tags, if you like. These correspond to different aspects of church life where you may be able to serve. I think particularly if you were here this morning you'll have received in the bulletin a list, quite an expansive list of all the different ways in which you may serve. So I'm going to preach just now from the word and then afterwards when we've had tea and coffee or you're having tea and coffee, please do take this opportunity to, if you like, put down where you may be committing to serve this term or this year. Some of you are new to the congregation, so you may be thinking about taking a bit more time to settle in. But if you're new and you're not serving anywhere yet and you would like to, see this is an opportunity to do so.

And also if you've been here for quite a while and you've already got your name on six rotas then be wise, that's all I would say. We want to share the opportunities that there are.
So it's really great for us to be able to commit and to work together to serve as a congregation. But what we're seeking to do is to open the way by which as many different people as possible can contribute where they feel called. So that will come later. What I want to do just now is not focus on the how or the where, the kind of specifics of where you may exactly find yourself serving right now or this year or over the next 10 years, but focus our hearts in on the question of motivation. So these things we always have to come and deal with first of all, don't we? What is the motivation that guides us that will enable us to then go out and serve and commit to serving? So I want to think about the motivation.
Our culture says in many different ways that self-fulfillment is the main goal for us nowadays.
So experiencing a self, a sense of self-fulfillment, looking at life as what you can get out of it to put it crudely and maybe that's a bit of a crash generalization. But the model that we consider because it's what Christ gave us and it's what we find in the Scriptures is a completely different way of looking at life. It's not a way of saying, what would I like to do with my life that will give me most pleasure or fulfillment or status, anything like that, but it's actually the model that Christ gives us is a life of self-denial.
[2:51] Now that's not to say that we don't use the gifts that we've naturally been given. It's not to say that we can't have enjoyment in what we do. We do, absolutely. But we are to consider how we are called to deny self as we serve so that we don't just think about serving as doing the things we like to do or that convenience us with the things that need to be done, that must be done, that require getting our hands dirty at times because to serve at times is messy. And so we have to consider the motivation of our hearts in order to be able to serve. So that's what I want to do tonight. And I want to use these two passages but not look at all of them to pick out one particular phrase that you may have noticed, may have picked up on that occurs in both of them. Paul uses a phrase in both of them to describe the way that he sees his life and the way that he sees the way that he gives his life in service. And it's this phrase, he uses this allusion if you like.

He says that he is being poured out or he is about to be poured out as a drink offering. Now, that may seem like a strange phrase to pick up on just now, a kind of peculiarity from the Old Testament. But I want to just for a minute consider why he uses that phrase and then say, okay, why he uses that phrase? Well, what's the significance of that? And then tie it back into the whole idea of serving. So he says in the Philippians passage in verse 17, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith. And in the Timothy passage, he says for I'm already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come. So this phrase drink offering, it comes from the Old Testament, you'll find a little bit about it specifically in the book of Numbers. If you were to go to chapter 15 and read there, you would read about some of the sacrificial procedures that God's ancient people, the Israelites used as a means of making

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atonement of dealing with their sin and their standing before God. And so God gives them these different procedures by which they are to approach him and by which they're to be able to come into his presence and have their sin dealt with. We read about different offerings, animal offerings. There were different reasons for these. There were different types of offerings, but we read about drink offering. What would often happen is that after the animal has been presented and prepared and is being sacrificed, for different types of sacrifices, there would be different measures of wine that would simply be poured out over the sacrifice to add to, to be a part of the sacrifice that is being offered to God. It's a part of the procedure, the offering before God, the way by which in this particular time in history, these people were to come before God and to become right with him. So that's what he's referring to. Paul knew about this because he was steeped in this culture. And Timothy, who he's writing to as well, would have been familiar with what he's talking about. So it's a term that they're familiar with. It's maybe not a term that you're familiar with. But by and large, that's what it's all about. It's quite simply this wine that is poured over this offering and it adds to this sacrifice. It's a part of this sacrifice.

But the sacrifices, what of them, just for a minute? See, Paul also knew that the sacrifices as they were performed all through the Old Testament, never by themselves made atonement for sin. By sacrificing an animal, by pouring wine upon the sacrifice, that in and of itself didn't take away all of their sin. What these things do, as we read them in the Old Testament, all through the Old Testament, is they're always pointing us forward to the one who would become the true fulfillment sacrifice, whose sacrifice was so effective in making atonement for sin, Jesus Christ. Jesus' blood shed as his blood was poured out, the wine always was pointing forward to this great sacrifice. And so in many ways, these, always as we read these Old Testament procedures and different things that they have to go through, they point us forward to this great sacrifice, Jesus Christ. Now Paul knew that also very deeply and very personally, because he is somebody, he was somebody whose life had been about these procedures, this religion, this ancient religion and this way of seeing the need to come before God by sacrifice. But you know, the change that had happened in his life is when Jesus had met him and had shown him how everything was fulfilled in him, in Jesus. And so now Paul knew that his sins were paid for through and because of this person, Jesus, who had been killed unjustly, having lived a perfect life, his blood had been shed. He had paid for the sin that Paul had committed, that all people had committed and he is now raised and he now reigns. And so Paul, Paul had not only been if you like somebody who had sinned like we all sin, he'd also been somebody who had been putting all his attention on a system which took away from Jesus and all that Jesus had done. But Jesus in his grace and mercy had revealed to Paul that he was the one who had shed his blood for Paul. He was the one who had known him from before all time and had committed to going to the cross for him. And so this idea of sacrifice that Paul knew very well, Paul now knows personally for himself the one who had been sacrificed for him. Timothy knew this one also. And that is our calling. The Gospel calls us to see the relevance of

Jesus Christ as the one who makes atonement for our sin so that we may be at one, we may be forgiven by and we may know the peace of God as our sins are wiped clean because he has paid for them and so we can come into his presence and we can know his peace. This wonderful fulfillment is what he writes about in 2 Corinthians chapter 5. I'm just going to read a short section from it just to see the way in which he follows this through.

[10:12] Paul says in 2 Corinthians, for the love of Christ controls us because we've concluded this that one has died for all. You see the way that he makes this tie between what Jesus did in going to the cross and the fact that the effect of that is freedom from sin, forgiveness from sin for all who will trust in him. One has died for all. And so therefore Paul is deeply motivated by the grace that he has been shown by Jesus. He now knows that he no longer goes about his business earning favor, earning salvation, doing as much as he possibly can to build up a great CV that will impress his peers and his God. But his Savior has already died on the cross because of love, the love of God for him. And so he's deeply motivated by this bloodshed, by this Savior Jesus. And so I want to see how we see that in just these two different passages here, just to turn to them in turn briefly.

These two different usages, Philippians 1 and then in Timothy, as we follow through on the motivation that he talks about here. So what he describes in Philippians chapter 2 in verse 17 is, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith. See what he's saying there? He's alluding back to this ancient practice where the wine was poured out, it was

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emptied with a connotation there of being finished.
The connotation exists in this passage and more so in the Timothy one of literally being finished of being emptied out to death. We'll come to that a bit more in just a minute.
But he's speaking here to a church who he deeply cares about. He has great love for these people because he sees them as the ones who Christ came to claim as his own. Christ's sacrifice was effective to save these people and so Paul sees them and values them deeply and writes to them out of great love and concern for them and describes his attitude towards them, his attitude towards his own life as he pours out his life as a sacrifice with this imagery, with this illusion. If I am being poured out, if I am to be poured out as a drink offering. So there's a hint here of the fact that he may well consider threats he is under, that he may well face great trouble as he often did but even if it is to lead to the ultimate sacrifice of losing his life, there is no sense here in which he regrets this, in which he's complaining. He describes this willingness, this description of his life as this act of service being poured out. You see he goes on, that verse that I read from 2 Corinthians chapter 5, he goes on in that verse, having said that one has died for all, therefore all have died. He goes on to say this, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. See that emphasis, that those who live in Christ might no longer live for themselves because Paul understands that they have been bought at a price, that's the language that's used elsewhere in the Bible, that Christ's blood shed purchased a people for himself, so precious to him that he was willing to pay that ultimate price. And so Paul in understanding that says, well then why would I just live turned in upon myself, focused in upon my own desires or concerns, wants or needs or whatever, no he says I might live for others. And of course the particular expression if you like in Paul's own life was to be called as an apostle with a very specific and important ministry to perform, but even in that ministry, that very public, very important pivotal ministry, never was he or not often, does he at least come across as being all about himself, he comes across as being about the church, those for whom
Christ shed his blood. So there's that great sense that he just uses this illustration to describe this attitude to life, he's happy to be poured out, to be emptied for the sake of this church, who we notice if we read the verse again, themselves act as a sacrificial offering in the way that they live, you see what he says in verse 17, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith. So without going into that further, there is that sense there also, the fact that he's writing to this church, who themselves as they know their Savior and all that he has done for them, in their own situation, live out lives of glad willing service for the King, who has given all for them. So he uses this phrase in Philippians, he also uses it in Timothy.
[16:07] So the second emphasis in 2 Timothy chapter 4, let me just read this verse again, for I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. So this is later in his ministry, he's writing to a particular person, what's he doing?

He's writing to a particular person, so that that particular person, Timothy, would himself be encouraged and led in the way that he serves the church. See Paul keeps all through his life being concerned for the ministry of the Gospel, for the building up of the church, for the fellowship of the saints, for Jesus' people. And so later in his ministry, he's writing to Timothy, he wants this Gospel ministry to flourish and to grow, and we get the real sense here that he's facing his own death. So see the words that he uses, I'm already being poured out as a drink offering. And another image he uses, the time of my departure has come, the time of my departure has come, time for him to leave where he is and what he's doing and go home to be with his Lord. Now just remember for a minute who Paul is, or who Paul was. Paul was called Saul in an earlier phase of his life before he met Jesus, and his life was very different. He was somebody who was steeped in Judaism and who had a degree of status in his community, the men he had a degree of ease and position and authority as he went about his business. He describes his life in these words, as I read from some of his other words, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. This was Paul's assessment of his life. What that meant was that he was establishment, he was somebody he was pretty secure as he went about his business. What was Jesus' calling on his life? It was to recognise that all that he had been, he was to put away, he was to put off, and he was to take on Christ, and he was to serve, and as a result of that service, his status changed, he went from being establishment to being outcast, he went from being persecutor to being persecuted. What a change in his life. Again, think about how did he have to change in the

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way that he approached his life? Imagine if he kept within him the thought, what do I want to get from this life? What do I want to achieve next? He was called to lose so much, but as we're going to come on and see, of course he gained so much in Christ. He gained so very much. So this passage that he just alludes to here in this phrase that he alludes to here in Timothy, as he suggests I'm already being poured out as a drink offering, the time of my departure is in the air, his life has changed radically and he's become somebody who has lost many privileges and he was faced many beatings and shipwrecks and he's been alienated and he's been scorned. Because he had been called to serve, that's his own particular service, that was the calling that Jesus had for him in his own situation.

Is there any sense here of regret, of frustration or of bitterness? There's absolutely none because for him Christ is all. He genuinely knew the gospel at work in his life, the effect of the shed blood of Jesus for him, taking him from darkness to light so he sees his previous life with all his privileges as darkness and the new light that he had been brought into in the gospel in Jesus. And he's simply saying to them, he's simply saying to Timothy that this is the situation for him, this is where God has brought him to in his life and again he uses this particular phrase being poured out as a drink offering, being poured out coming to the end of himself, the end of the time that God has for him. So in Philippians and in Timothy he uses these phrases. But finally I just want to do another thing to go back into each verse and to see a particular aspect of what he goes on to say that's really crucial to help us see the attitude he had in each situation, the attitude that he had.

So if we go back again to the Philippians verse and see this one thing, this one distinctive that comes out, Paul's been expressing the fact that he sees his life willingly as this opportunity to serve, to lay down his life, to be poured out. How? Well he says, even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and I rejoice with you all. Isn't that remarkable? Even if I am to be poured out, even if I am to lose my life, I've lost my life in many ways, I've been giving my life consistently and constantly, even if I am to be poured out to death, I'm glad.

[22:30] I rejoice. And he says, and so should you. You rejoice with me. How is he able to say that? Because he knows that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Because he knows that Christ is all, because he knows that Christ is our fulfillment, our absolute fulfillment.

In him we find our true meaning, our true fulfillment, even as we serve him, even to the point of death, he is the one who is all for us. So just to see that, just to see that, I am glad and I rejoice with you all. Remember as well that the context in Philippians 2, if you were to go back to the start of the chapter, what does he describe at the start of Philippians 2, he describes in many ways that great motivation where we see the description of Christ exalted who humbles himself to serve. The great Lord in heaven who for the love of his people was willing to come down from heaven and to become man and to give his life humbly out of love. So there's this great joy in serving. Second one in Timothy, what does he go on to say there? Well, if there's joy in serving, the second thing I want to bring out is that there's also hope. There's hope. So he says in the Timothy passage, for I'm already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come. He goes on to say those famous words, I fought the good fight, I've finished the race, I've kept the faith. Henceforth, or from now on, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day. What's he saying there?

He's anticipating that when he is literally poured out, when he gives up his life, when the time has finally come and his service is ended and he goes home to be with his Lord, what will that look like for him? He knows and is convinced because he's been promised a crown of righteousness that will be given to him from his Savior Jesus who will meet him and who will welcome him. And all of the anticipation of that, all of the fulfillment that he sees in that, all of what that means, that he will go home to be with his Lord because that is why Christ came, that he may take a people to be with himself so that as they live their lives and give themselves in service they may look forward to this day where they will see him face to face and they will receive this great crown of righteousness and they will know peace and they will know joy in his presence and they will know a time of blessing where all of their tears, all of the things that they struggled with, all of the things that were hard for them will be taken away. And that is the promise for you and I also that as we are called to see Christ as the one who gives us everything and who saves us, whose blood shed for us is what we need so very much as we see this great motivation then to have joy in serving him, we also have this hope because our service is not futile, isn't it? An awful thing to go to work feeling like you don't

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make a difference, feeling like what you do doesn't really count for anything or anything else that you do. The feeling of futility of just doing something for the sake of doing it, that's so frustrating. Paul speaks about a crown of righteousness that is laid up for him, this great hope, this end goal where in the great timing of God all of his people will be gathered together and that's the other thing just to see in this because Paul knows that when he reaches that time and when he goes to be with his Lord and he personally receives this crown of righteousness, he will also see all those others who Jesus loves and who has bought with his blood and who Paul has been serving also receiving these crowns of righteousness.
[27:02] You see what he goes on to say that is laid up for me the crown of righteousness and then he goes on to say at the end of this verse and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

So there is also that application for us as we consider, as you consider maybe if you're really struggling to serve right now and again you have to apply this in your own situation, serving in the church, serving by witnessing, serving with the difficulty that it is and trying to testify to your friends about Jesus. However it is that you serve, it may be really difficult for you now and so you need to hear again that there is a crown of righteousness for you because Jesus knows you by name and anticipates you coming home to be with him.
But you also will share in this great scene where all the saints are gathered around the throne and all of God's people will see him as he is in his glory and will rejoice in his goodness because he has bought these people for himself and he has brought them home and it's for that that we serve.
So then we apply the whole idea of serving, you must consider how you may serve, there are many ways that we can serve but we must always in an ongoing way make sure that our hearts are willing to serve because we have been served by the great lover of our soul, Jesus. But as we serve, remember serve with joy. If you're anything like me, you may have an initial burst of enthusiasm and then start to feel a little niggle of grudge coming into your life, oh man I'm on again, the rota, why me, I just did this. We serve with joy, we need to share the load when we serve obviously as we work together as a body with all of the different gifts that we have but we also serve with hope and sometimes we need to remind each other of that hope. A great joy that we look forward to, a great reason that we do this, we're not just doing this to maintain an institution or a sense of something, we do this toward that great goal when Christ's people will be gathered together in peace.
Let's pray. Father we rejoice in your salvation for us, help us to know that salvation may change our hearts, make us to be people who love you and who serve joyfully and who serve with hope, help us to share in this task, help us to be wise as we discern now how we can serve. We pray that you would be over all that we do and bless all that we do for the glory of your name so that your kingdom may grow and we pray also that your kingdom may come. We pray in Christ. Amen.

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