

Torrey Conference 1980 A Servant Attitude

By Stuart Briscoe

Speaker 1:

Torrey Memorial Bible Conference, January 1980. This is a message by Reverend Stuart Briscoe, pastor of the Elmbrook Church, Waukesha, Wisconsin, formerly with the torch bearers. The title of this message is The Servant Attitude.

Speaker 2:

Whether you call it Waukesha or Waukesha, Wisconsin. That is at least the base for Stuart Briscoe these days and then literally around the world. When we met Stewart the first time, he had just flown in and had jet lag, probably a couple of days because of the schedule he was keeping with torch bearers from Europe. He has spoken at Biola a number of times. The most recently I think was a year and a half ago during the missionary conference.

The author of The Fullness of Christ, Getting into Marriage, and Let's Get Moving. Stuart Briscoe is the logical one to keynote our conference for two reasons. He's been here before and I think he has a finger on the pulse of Biola College. And secondly, we wanted to get good mileage out of him because Stuart will be here only through Wednesday morning. So we want you to keep an eye on an ear on Stuart so that we can get our money's worth and we can get good mileage out of him during the time. I hope, Stu, that you will also mention your two day series in the morning as well. Join me once again in welcoming back Stuart Briscoe to Biola.

Stuart Briscoe:

Thank you, Ron, very much. Very nice to be back here. For those of you to whom I have not spoken before, I would like to point out that I do not have an impediment. This is English. I first came over to the United States, I think, 16 years ago, and on my very first trip I had the privilege of coming to Biola for I think it was the Torrey Memorial Conference at that particular time. And I'm happy finally to get asked back again. That's English humor.

I'm not quite sure why I got the job of taking the first session this morning, but I do feel a little like the man who went to a special event down on the Texas Ranch. One of these Texas ranchers decided that he'd have 1500 of his close, intimate friends around for the evening. And when they got there, they congregated around the pool in which they saw a large shark. They were all discussing the shark when the rancher came out and said, Now I'm glad you've noticed my little shark. It's a friend of mine and I just want to present a challenge to any of you young people, any

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of you who will jump in and swim length in the pool with the shark. I will either give you two of my oil wells, 1000 of my acres, or the hand of one of my daughters in marriage and noticed it, said it.

Then there's a loud splash and everybody gasped because they'd never seen such courage or such tomfoolery in their lives. And somebody was swimming furiously at the center of the pool. The shark circled him twice, came in to take a piece of them. That was too late. They pulled him out the other end and the rancher said, I really don't know what to say because you didn't let me finish. I was just kidding. I would never ask anybody to do anything like that. But he said, I am known as a man of my word. So what is it you want? Do you want the two oil Wells? And he said, no. He said, I've got more oil than I can handle. He said, do you want 1000 acres of Ranch land? He said, no, I've got thousands of acres back home. Which daughter is that you want to marry? He said, I'm a happily married man with three kids. I don't want your daughter. He said, well, what do you want? He said, I want to know who pushed me in that pool.

Well, I don't know who pushed me in this pool, but I'm in it now and I'm in it till 9:30. I promise to stop at 9:30, so that's 35 minutes that I've got. It will seem considerably longer, but I promise you that's all it will be.

Some time ago I was watching the Academy Awards, which I think emanates from this part of the world. I've been rather delayed that evening, so I was only able to watch the last 3 hours of the program. I was particularly interested that year because they were going to have a special presentation to Lord Olivier. He used to be Lawrence Olivier, and then he became Sir Laurence Olivier, and now he's Lord Olivier. And he was being honored for being the great actor that he is. They gave him his award, and then he launched into the most dramatic, verbose piece of acting that I have ever seen. It was rather interesting to notice that while he was speaking, the cameras panned around the audience, which, of course, was made up of people in the acting profession. And they zeroed in on the four candidates for Actor of the Year.

It was very interesting to notice, as Sir Lawrence or Lord Olivier spoke, that all of them listened with rapt attention to what he had to say. And when he was through, they gave the award to him. And then they announced the winner of act of the Year. And he came up and it was John Voight. And when John Voight was given his award that particular time, I was intrigued to notice that he hardly mentioned his award. But he spoke at great length about the tremendous ability of Lord Olivier.

It's rather uncommon for people in the same profession to speak warmly of other people in the same profession. Once I was thinking of that. I was thinking about the way that some of the people in the Bible speak warmly of other people in the Bible. If you want to get an opinion as to how good Lord Olivier is in the acting profession, probably the best thing to do is to ask the actor of the year.

It seemed to me, if you want to get an opinion of the effectiveness of somebody in the Bible, probably one of the best ways of getting it would be to check on what some other people in the Bible have to say.

Whilst I was thinking in this particular way, I was rather excited to discover that in Acts 13 and the 36th verse, the great Apostle Paul spoke very warmly at the great Old Testament King David. And whilst I had a tremendously high opinion of David before that, I was particularly thrilled to notice how beautifully and how succinctly the great Apostles spoke so warmly of the great King. This is what he said about him just summarized everything for me. He said, when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.

Now, one of the things that was rather intriguing to me about the great Apostles succinct summary of the life and Ministry of the great King was that he used the word serve. When you think of all the things that King David did, it is something of a surprise to notice that the dominant word there is serve. If you were to write an essay or a paper on a great King, it is quite possible that you would use the word rule or you would use the word reign.

David, of course, was a great King. He was also a great warrior, great soldier. If you were to write a paper on the great warrior, a soldier, you probably use the word Fort or battled or triumphed or won or defeated or conquered. David was also a great author. And when you write about a great author, then presumably you would use the word to author or to write. He was a great musician, so presumably you would expect to find the word compose. There are many, many things that David did. And yet the fascinating thing to me was that when the great Apostle wanted, in a phrase to summarize the great life and great Ministry of the great King, he didn't use compose, he didn't use author, he didn't use conquer, he didn't use train, he didn't use lead, he didn't use rule, he didn't use reign.

He just used one little word: serve. When you think about it, that was the key to all that David did. For in all these things that David did, he recognize that the one thing he was basically and fundamentally required to do was to serve. I think it's particularly important that we recognize the importance of the serving spirit.

I think it is imperative in our contemporary society that we rediscover the ministering mentality. The reason being, of course, that this idea of serving and this idea of ministering is somewhat strange to us in the particular mindset that is prevailing in our society. We are called now by some people, the me first generation. Other people call us the Narcissistic generation. I must find out what it means some time, but I wanted to quote it too, because if I hadn't, you would not have realized that. I knew the expression, but I think it has the idea of being wrapped up in yourself.

The great emphasis at the present time is self-improvement, self-realization. And there's a new magazine that has come out called Self. And I was noticing some advertising for this particular magazine recently where it listed a whole lot of things like self-realization, self-improvement. And underneath it said the first word in all these things is 'self.' There is a tremendous orientation towards ourselves. There's a tremendous orientation towards improving ourselves. There's a tremendous orientation towards realizing the full capability of ourselves, all of which may have validity, but there's a danger to it, and the danger is very obvious.

The danger to this emphasis on ourselves is that if we're not very careful, we may become totally disorientated as far as our humanity is concerned and come to the conclusion that everything exists for our benefit and become terribly hurt when everything does not become as enamored with ourselves as we ourselves are.

There's a very simple antidote to this, and it is to learn to develop a serving spirit, to learn to develop a ministering mentality. Now, of course, the Apostle Paul is a delightful illustration of this himself. You remember that when he went to Thessalonica he had a very brief Ministry, but a remarkably effective Ministry in that place. They ran him out of town, which was how he usually concluded his special visits to places for special meetings. But shortly after he had left, he wrote a very warm letter to the people who had been converted during his time there. And he commended them because they were a model group of believers. And among other things, he said to them that they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. Now he was there very brief time, but had a singularly effective Ministry.

And it would seem to me that one of the reasons for the effectiveness of this brief Ministry was that at the very root of it was the Colonel of the Christian gospel. The Colonel of the Christian gospel is not that God owes something to you. The Colonel of the Christian gospel is that God is God, and you have the inestimable privilege of getting to know him. And when you get to know him, you turn to him. When you turn to him, you turn from that which is contrary to him. And you can demonstrate the reality of your turning to him and the reality of your turning from what is contrary to him by the degree of serving him.

And so there are three things in this gospel that Paul preached. He preached the fact that you have the tremendous privilege of knowing God and demonstrating your knowledge by turning to him. You'll demonstrate the reality of your turning to him by the reality in which you turn from that which is contrary to him. And you will also demonstrate the reality of both in the degree in which you learn to serve him. So at the very root, at the Minister that he had was a call to acknowledge God in a life of service.

Paul's message was simply this, you can come to the place of learning to serve the living God. You will also notice that when he wrote to the Galatians, he was speaking to the Galatians about the dangers of legalism and the delights of Liberty. But he also pointed out to them that there were certain dangers involved in Liberty as well. But he showed them how they could be very careful not to abuse their Liberty. And this is how he said they should guard against abuse of Liberty. He said, you should use your Liberty lovingly to serve one another lovingly to serve one another. You'll never come into much of a problem with your Liberty if you use your Liberty lovingly to serve other believers.

And so we see the Apostle not only exhorting those who respond to Christ to serve the living God, but he is also encouraging them and exhorting them to serve the Christian community. Now, of course, sometimes people don't quite get hold of this message, but there's another thing that the Apostle Paul emphasized in his Ministry. And you will notice that on numerous occasions he talked about his own life of service and also commended other people as being his fellow servants.

You trace this expression in his writing sometime and then find out what he as a servant and they as fellow servants were doing. And you will discover that they were not only serving the living God and serving the Christian community, but they were also serving a needy world. They were looking for areas where Christ had not been named. Paul particularly was anxious to build where other people had not laid foundations, because he recognized that there was a needy world in which they could serve and which they themselves must serve.

So it is no surprise, therefore, to discover that the Apostle Paul is high on King David because they too, had discovered a fundamental of spiritual experience that you have got to learn to serve. This should come as no surprise to us when we bear in mind that our Lord Jesus summarized it beautifully as far as he personally was concerned, when he said, I did not come to be served, I came to serve. Now there's a real problem in the Christian Church at the present time because, as has often been observed, it would appear that the secular society has more impact on the Christian Church than the Christian Church has impact on the secular society.

What is happening in the Christian Church is that to a very large extent we are producing people in the Church who have the me first mentality. Accordingly, they look upon God as somebody who serves them. They look upon the Church as something that serves them. They look upon the world as something which serves them. It is not uncommon, of course, to come across a presentation of the Christian gospel that seems to present a God who exists primarily to quote, meet our needs, end quote. Now, there is no question that he does meet our needs in superlative fashion.

But I challenge the concept that God exists primarily to meet our needs for two very obvious reasons. If God exists primarily to meet our needs, what on Earth did he do before we were around to have needs to meet? The second problem is this. If God exists primarily to meet our needs, what on Earth will he do when all the needs have been met? It would appear that if God is in existence primarily to meet human needs, then he must have worked at half throttle before we came along and he will take an early retirement when all the needs have been met.

In short, God demonstrates how great a God he is by meeting our needs. I submit to you that this kind of presentation of the Christian gospel does despite to the doctrine of who God is. He is certainly the great big meter in the sky. But if that is the emphasis of our presentation, we must never be surprised if we produce a whole lot of people who are as self centered as a secular society. The only thing is that they look to God to realize their self. Rather than jogging or fiber diets or yoga or TM or the born-again experience.

Let's make absolutely certain that God does not exist primarily to meet our needs, that God exists exclusively to be God, and that in his exclusive existence to be God, we have the unspeakable privilege of knowing Him and of serving Him. Then we come to the Christian Church, and very, very often we find a lot of disgruntled people in the Christian Church. And the reason that they are disgruntled more often than not is that they feel that their needs are not being met. They are sitting there waiting for somebody to meet their needs.

Now, there's no question about it that one can reasonably anticipate that if one identifies with a Fellowship of believers, one's needs will be met. But you've got to bear something in mind. If everybody is sitting there waiting for their needs to be met, there'll be nobody to meet the needs. The emphasis, therefore, cannot be that which is in diametric opposition to the emphasis of our Lord Jesus. The emphasis in many of our churches is simply this. I didn't come to Minister. I came to be ministered to. But strangely, people who have that philosophy called themselves followers of the one who said exactly the opposite.

Listen, the reality of the Christian community is not to be found in me sitting there becoming increasingly disgruntled because I'm not being served enough. The reality of the Christian community comes when I move into it with a tremendous desire to serve not only the living God, but the people with whom I have come into a community experience. Therefore, I would ask you to check on two things. Number one, in what sense am I serving the living God? Number two, in what sense am I serving a specific Christian community, which will lead quite naturally to the third thing.

There is a sense in which a lot of people feel that the world in general and society in particular owes them something. We have all observed that there's a tremendous emphasis on human rights at the present time, and one must applaud this in many ways, but unfortunately, it is rather symptomatic in many instances of the prevailing attitude. I have my rights and society in general and the government in particular exists to make sure that my inalienable rights are met. And the simple fact of the matter is this. It just isn't true, and that if you sit around waiting for God to serve you, and you go to Church waiting for the Church to serve you, and then in between times, you look to the society and the government and the school and every other person around you to serve you, you will become a very shriveled, inadequate, reprehensible person.

I show you a better way. It is simple, it is. To look at that needy world out there and ask yourself the question in the context of serving the living God, in the context of serving the Christian community, what specific objective can I have in terms of this needy world and my way of serving it?

You see, what we need is the development of the serving spirit. What we desperately need is the development of the ministering mentality. Now, Paul went on to say something further about the servant's spirit which he saw exemplified in King David. He said this when David had served God's purpose, when David had served God's purpose.

There is a general sense in which we develop a serving spirit and a ministering mentality, but there is a more narrow sense in which we recognize that God has a purpose and our serving is to be channeled into that purpose. Now one of the most exciting things that you can tell anybody at any time is that God has a purpose.

But I don't know if you've noticed this. A lot of people are getting very nervous in America at the present time. A lot of young people are getting very nervous about the possibility of the reinstatement of the draft. A lot of people are getting very nervous about the Ayatollah. They're getting terribly nervous about the President of Pakistan, and there are some Russians who may or

may not be having some Olympics. They're getting very concerned about Carter, they're getting the heebie jeebies about just about everything.

And I would have to say one simple thing to that, and it is this. I think you've got very good grounds to be nervous. But let me add something very important that is distinctively Christian. God has a purpose. God has a purpose. And the purpose that God has has been clearly enunciated in Scripture. It is simply this that he is working carefully, meticulously and relentlessly towards one glorious moment when he will be seen to be all in awe. Immediately prior to that glorious moment, everything will be placed under our Lord Jesus. Every name will go to Him. And every time we'll confess that he is Lord, when that takes place, Jesus, with everything submitted to him, will then turn to the Father and submit Himself and everything submitted to him to the Father. And on a glorious, eternal, cosmic scale, God will be seen to be in every area of created reality, very God of very God. All in all.

Now, be nervous. You see, what we need to do is simply develop, in our contemporary situation an eschatological dimension which is simply the dimension of knowing that God is God and will inevitably, eternally, relentlessly on a cosmic scale, be seen to be God.

That's where everything is heading. But that isn't all that we know of God's purpose. We know God's purpose in this dimension, but we also know that we, as individuals can be part of the acknowledging of Christ as Lord, which will take place immediately prior to Him submitting everything to the Father. What part can I play in terms of Christ being acknowledged as Lord? Well, that depends. It depends on something very fundamental, something very, very elementary. God has created you for an intelligent purpose, to work out that which he for ordained for you to work out. And he has done something so obvious and so delightful, he has not only created you for an intelligent purpose so that you can work out what he for ordained for you to work out, he has superbly equipped you for it. He has made you basically ideal for what he wants you to be.

Now, that doesn't mean to say that there isn't an awful lot of training needed, an awful lot of polishing, an awful lot of garbage to be got rid of. It doesn't mean that you came into the world to finish object. It does mean that fundamentally and basically in terms of temperament, in terms of heritage, in terms of spiritual gift, in terms of experience, he is.

And he has. And he will equip you to be ideal for his purpose for you. Now, that's very exciting indeed, particularly if you believe it. And I heard one throttled Amen down here. So I'm encouraged, I'm encouraged to believe that there are some people who got hold of something very basic. Not only that, they should develop a serving spirit and a ministering mentality, but

that this general spirit should be channeled into an intelligent understanding of what God's purpose for that person is in the whole cosmic plan.

So we need to ask ourselves another question. What understanding do I have of God's specific purpose for me within the whole scope of his cosmic plan? If you're not sure, let me suggest a very simple experiment to you. Sit down and figure out how he made you. Or sit down, scratch your head and say, I need to discover one thing. What is it that makes me uniquely me? There's only one of you. Praise God. Now, if you are unique to you because God made you unique to you, it is a reasonable assumption that if he made you uniquely you, he made you unique to you for the unique purpose that he has in mind for you.

Therefore, you can discover the kind of thing that he wants you to do in his purpose. When you come to grips with the kind of person you are, I get a little bit alarmed about the mysticism, the rules and reigns in evangelical circles, particularly when people in a Christian College and in their senior year. This discovery of the divine will, this discovery of God's purpose is something that seems to be up for grabs and you spend your time worrying about it. Quit worrying about it. He's ten times more concerned you find it than you can ever be. Simply sit down and figure out how he made you and then say to yourself, One simple thing, God, I firmly believe you are intelligent enough to make me basically ideal for what you want me to do.

I've had some people come up with the weirdest things God has called me to do this. I've had people say that God has called them to a musical Ministry. So I said, Why are you telling me? Well, I want your affirmation. I said, okay, sing. And they sang. And I said, I have a gift of discernment. And I want to tell you something.

I don't know what he called you to be, but I know what he did not call you to be. If he had called you to sing, he would not have given you a voice like a cinder under a door. Sit down and figure out who you are. Sit down and figure out how you got to be who you are. Identify your gifts. Look at your strengths. Be honest about your weaknesses. See the things you enjoy doing. Identify the things you'll roll and detest doing, and then say to yourself, this is me. This is me. God, I'm not perfect. I'm not ideal. I'm not the finished product. But I can see an awful lot of raw material here. Now, God, the raw material has qualities that you will fashion into being what you want me to be in the context of what you want me to do. And then relax and get on with it.

When David had served God's purpose, there's another thing then came into Paul's thinking. He said, when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, in his own generation. I don't know if you've noticed this, but there's a tendency in contemporary Christianity to hark back to the good old days.

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Now, as far as your young people are concerned, the good old days are probably the Jesus movement. It must be a bit of a decade ago. Some of the older folks can think back to some other things. Some of them talk about the New England revivals, oh, they were the great days. Some of the folks think back to the Reformation, oh, oh, oh, that was a great time. Some people give you the impression they were the founder members of the first century Church.

That's how he does that. I come across churches all over the world that simply say, well, we're simply the first century Church I come across other churches say, well, we're simply an extension of the Reformation. And I go to other people and they say, well, we're still living in the good of the revivals.

And I see some people still trying to be like Jesus movements. Now, there's no question about it that Church history is invaluable. There's no question about it, that it is invaluable to show you how not to do it. That's one of the main reasons you should study Church history. And occasionally you'll come across something that tells you exactly how to do it.

And the lovely thing about history is that it will teach you the mistakes that other people made so you don't need to make them yourself. But I deplore the attitude that seems to think that all we need is a rehash of what they did in previous generations. What we need now is something uniquely suited in terms of eternal principle to our contemporary generation.

David was called not to serve a generation that lived before him. David was called to do what you and I are called to do that is to serve God's purpose in our own generation.

And here's a very simple and very obvious truth, but it is shattering. Every generation is called primarily to serve its own generation. That's so simple and so obvious, but so utterly overwhelming. Our generation is characterized by having 4 billion people as part of it. Our generation is characterized by having 50% of that 4 billion people untouched and reached by the Christian gospel. Our generation is characterized by having the largest numerical Church that the world has ever known. Our generation is characterized by the fact of having the wealthiest Christian Church the world has ever known.

Our generation is characterized by having the best educated Christian Church the world has ever known and the most sophisticated resources the Church has ever known. In short, this generation is something else.

But I want to suggest something to you. We're not doing a very good job of serving our generation. We have a bigger job than any previous generation ever had. We have got greater manpower and resources to do the job than any previous generation ever had.

And yet, I urge you, I encourage you not just to look at what was done and think of how you can perpetuate what has already been done. But I urge you young people to sit down, to pray and to think and to study and to get all the input you can to find out how this generation is going to reach this generation, because frankly, we're not doing it. There's a great tendency in the Christian Church in many areas to be perfectly happy with maintaining the status quo. And if you examine most of the status quo, you've got to come to the sad conclusion that the status is extremely cool and it won't do.

So here's another question. In what way am I specifically serving my generation? You can add that to the other question. In what way am I specifically serving God's purpose? Which you can add to the other question, in what way am I serving the living God, the Christian community, and the needy world?

Which brings me to the final thing. When David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep. Please notice the timing. Thank you. That's so encouraging. I can see what everybody has done. A little earlier in the talk, they fell asleep already. David, when he had served God's purpose in his own generation, fell asleep. This, they tell me, is a Hebraic euphemism, and we all know what they are. A euphemism is a nice way of saying something that will be a little unpleasant if you said what you really mean. I discovered that Christians, not only Hebrews, use euphemisms.

I was always perplexed when I was a young boy in Church hearing the announcement that Dear Sister so-and-so was laid on one side in a bed of sickness. I used to say, why doesn't somebody turn her over and clean her up?

They meant she was ill. Now, Christians don't get ill. They're laid on one side in a bed of sickness. I discovered something else. Christians don't die. They quote, Go to be with the Lord. That's a euphemism. Now, when it says that he fell asleep here, that's a euphemism. What it means is when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he dropped dead. But you can't say that. But I rather like this euphemism because it gives you a little clue to something, and that is that when you die is not the end. It's like falling asleep with a view to waking up.

Now, don't get into soul sleep arguments and say that's what I'm preaching. All I'm quoting is Paul, so argue with him if you can find him. What I'm saying is very simple. It is if you fall asleep, there is a real expectation that you will wake up. And you know what the Bible says that when you wake up, you'll see the Lord Jesus.

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And when you see the Lord Jesus, he'll come over to you and hopefully say, well, then, good and faithful King, warrior, composer, student, janitor, professor.

No, there's always the possibility that after you've fallen asleep and wake up, you'll see him and they'll say, well done, good and faithful servant, not terribly concerned about whether you're a student or a theologian or a professor or a doctor, fundamentally concerns to whether you were a servant in the context of those professions.

That's motivation because you see, the alternative to that is that you'll wake up and you'll say, what on Earth were you playing at down there? I called you to serve God's purpose in your own generation. There's another fascinating thought. Remember that the Lord Jesus, when he told one of his parables, seemed to commend somebody who was pretty sharp and pretty shrewd, and his commendation went something like this. I wish my disciples were half as sharp and shrewd as those people out there are, because if they were, they would take their resources and be much more sharp and shrewd in the use of their resources. And if they were, then the use of their resources would produce that which would welcome them into eternal habitations, which put in very simple phraseology, I think means this. You've got an awful lot of resources now with which to serve God's purpose in your own generation.

And if you do it properly, when you wake up, they'll not only be the Lord Jesus done in there saying, well done, they'll be all the dividends on your investments welcoming you into eternal habitations. Of course, there's always the possibility that you could have got into the primarily secular thinking and have just settled for having everything revolve around you and everything Minister to you. And then you'll wake up and not only would the Lord say, what on Earth were you doing? But you found nobody there to welcome you. I think that would be sad.

I would suggest to you that you take Paul's commendation of David and take as a key verse if you're not already done so these words, when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.

Let's pray. Gracious lord, thank you for the privilege of being alive. Thank you for the privilege of being redeemed. Thank you for the privilege of having an intelligent grasp of what it is that you want us to do. Thank you for the gift of the resources to do it. Thank you for the knowledge of that eschatological truth that allows us to live in trying times with hope, knowing that one day we'll fall asleep and then wake up to eternal realities.

And thank you that in the interim, we can and must develop a serving spirit and a Minister mentality. And you'll help us in Christ's name. Amen.