

What are deacons?

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[0 : 00] Mark 10 from verse 35 to verse 45. Mark 10 from verse 35.

! Mark 10 from verse 35. Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. Teacher, they said, we want you to do for us whatever we ask. What do you want me to do for you? He asked. They replied, let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory. You don't know what you're asking, Jesus said. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?

We can, they answered. Jesus said to them, you will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant.

These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared. When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, You know that those who were regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

[1 : 20] And their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.

And whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Wonderful and amazing passage of scripture. Perhaps somebody could pray for us as we come to look at God's word, please.

Father, we do thank you for your Holy Spirit.

Lord, we thank you for your Holy Spirit overshadowing the translation, that we can have the word in our own language.

[2 : 46] And Father, we do pray that that same Holy Spirit may speak through Philip, Lord, tonight, and into our hearts, Lord, that we might understand these great things of God. Yes.

Lord, indeed, we might be your servants, Lord. We would not seek to hold it over each other's deeds to be further. So, Lord, help us, Lord, to understand.

Help us to take it in. Give us the courage of the Holy Spirit to practice what we hear in the days of our head. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you very much, Ray.

Amen. So, past few Sunday evenings, we've been following a sequence of thought.

You could go various ways through the sequence, but we've been looking, I think, at the means God uses to progress his kingdom and to build his church. So, we looked quite a bit at the word of God and the doctrine of Scripture, and we said that God, the God of the Bible, is characteristically a God who uses his word.

[4 : 05] When he wants to make a world, he doesn't snap his fingers or cast something somewhere. He speaks, and the speaking makes the world.

So, God characteristically uses his word. This is always a Trinitarian thing. God uses his word through his Son, by his Spirit.

That is characteristically the way that God works. And then we moved on to thinking about the fact that God uses people. God likes to use people.

You might say it's a bit of a waste of his time because people are so unreliable, but presumably, God has a purpose in it, and I think not least, to bless the people who he uses, because being engaged in the service of God is a privilege and a blessing to the people concerned.

And we looked at how he uses his word via the person who you might call a herald or an evangelist or a proclaimer or a preacher, and we saw that there is this pattern of good news, of an achievement of a great victory, and then somebody running to tell other people what's taken place, and this is exactly the pattern of the evangelist who tells the good news of what Jesus Christ did on the cross and goes and tells people about it.

[5 : 45] So we have the preacher. We talked about that a little while ago, and then we were thinking, I think it was last week, wasn't it, about the fact that God shepherds his people via his word, but the people that he uses in this case are the elders equals the overseers equals the shepherds, and you can give them lots of different names depending on which translation you use or how far you get away from the Greek and things like that, but the elder, the presbyter, the overseer, sometimes translated the bishop, and the shepherds, sometimes translated as the pastors, and these are basically the same people in the Bible.

they are always, I think always, assumed to be a group of people in a church, and God uses these people to shepherd his people, to do what shepherds do, to make sure the sheep are not straying and to try and look after them if they're ill and try and feed them up, make sure they get plenty of exercise and good food, and this is the sort of thing that God does as a shepherd and he uses his people to do that.

Let's just look at one text on this which is 1 Timothy 5. If you, I would encourage you to try and look these up, but if you get hopelessly lost, don't worry because they will be read out anyway.

But we're going to go for 1 Timothy 5. And this is Paul in the New Testament speaking to one of his particular helpers, telling him, that's Timothy, how to get the different churches in order, particularly the church in Ephesus where Timothy was at the time.

And he says in 1 Timothy 5, verse 17, the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

[8 : 12] For the scripture says, do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain and the worker deserves his wages. Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly so that the others may take warning. And there's lots of things being said there. But I was going to flag up in passing that he seems to make a distinction between the elders who direct the work of the church and perhaps a subset of elders who particularly do so via preaching and teaching.

I think that's what he has in mind. I'm not sure if that's a conclusive proof, but that would seem to fit. So you have a group of elders, perhaps they're all apt to teach, but perhaps some of them have a particular role in preaching and teaching.

Anyway, that was the elders and that's from a previous time and we're going to look at the servants or deacons.

And before I do that, shall I ask, were we okay with the elders bit then? Have I said anything that needs to be clarified? That was just a revision.

[9 : 38] Okay, I shall move on. So now, this evening, we're going to look at another group of people. So the Greek here is diakonos.

So I looked in my Greek and the emphasis is on the a, so diakonos. And these are another set of people people.

So if you look into 1 Timothy 3 verses 1 to 13, both of these groups of people seem to be mentioned.

So we've got the overseers or elders and another group of people called deacons. So I'll just read this so that you can see the similarities and the differences.

1 Timothy 3, here is a trustworthy saying, if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble, a good task. Now, the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate.

[10 : 50] Sounds as though his temperature ought to be about 23 degrees. I think it means something like, I haven't looked it up, there's quite a few words that mean clear thinking or self-controlled, that sort of idea.

So I'm not sure it's referring to his temperature, but, you know, the temperature of his life.

Temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. I presume that's to do with children in the child phase.

I don't think the Bible holds parents responsible for the choices that they're and the lifestyle that children have when they are adults in their own right, but I think it's saying that there is an important aspect of ability for the elder to be a good father.

He must manage his own family well. Verse 5, if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

[12 : 22] He must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. So the description of the character profile, spiritual profile of somebody who could be an overseer.

As I said last time, I don't think this is saying that everybody of whom that could be said automatically has to be an overseer. I think it's saying if they're not that then they should definitely not be an overseer.

So now verse 8, deacons likewise are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.

They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested, and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the same way, their wives, there isn't a Greek word for wife, it's the word woman, wife, serves twice. So it could be their wives are to be women worthy of respect, or it could be the women who serve in this way.

[13 : 34] But let's take the translation here, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers, but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife, and must manage his children and his household well.

Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. So you see there the elders, the overseers, and the deacons, two separate groups of people.

And looking at Philippians 1 verse 1, this simply says the same thing again, and shows that it isn't just an unusual thing for one church.

Here in Philippians, the first verse, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So again, just in passing he says I'm greeting, two isn't it, I'm greeting you lot, all of you, the Christians, the saints, and the elders, and the deacons.

[15 : 00] So that seems to have been understood. So there are these people called deacons, not beacons, although they might be beacons, but they are actually deacons, and there is a work that they do, so diakonos is the Greek for deacon, sounds the same, doesn't it, and the activity, according to the little lines in my Greek New Testament, the accent is on the end, diakoni, diakonia, diakonia, that's whatever deacons do, deaconing, and we'll see how that gets translated, so you've got these people, deacons, and the stuff they do, deaconing, diakonia, and I've got three ways of looking at it, so diakonos, diakonia, diakonia, so let's look at it in three ways,

I'd say that this is fundamental, two, that it's general, and three, that it's particular, so the three points, but I'm allowed to put in another one, so I'm going to put in the zeroth point, and the zeroth point is that although deacon sounds very churchy, so if you ever read the Barchester Chronicles, there was the deacon and the archdeacon, and it all sounds, do you have archdeacons still, I think, don't we?

Yes, so you think, you know, archdeacon is probably wearing a robe and you know, a sort of nighty thing and things like that, and you think, oh, they can't possibly be members of the human race. Deacon in the Bible is not a religious word, it just means a servant, so you don't have to look this one up, but in John chapter 2, which is the bit about the turning of the water into wine, you remember that the servants, the kitchen staff, get involved with this, so Jesus' mother says they don't have any wine, and Jesus says, dear woman, why do you involve me?

My time has not yet come, as if to say, I'm not interested in this, and then his mother goes to the servants and says, whatever he tells you to do, do it, and actually Jesus tells them to fill up the big stone jars with water and take it in to the feast, and these servants are, whatever it is, diakonoi, deacons, so that's just a word for servant, and there's other examples of that as well, so my first point, it is not, don't start thinking, archdeacon, this, it just means a servant, in fact, particularly to do with somebody moving wine around, so we would say a waiter, okay, so that was the zeroth point which I snook in, so number one, it's fundamental, the idea of deaconing, you might say, this is just some funny idea that these independent

[18 : 24] Baptist churches have, and they think they scored a point, because they've got deacons, and they think that puts them a cut above everybody else, it's just a little weird Baptist sort of thing, and I want to say, number one, deaconing is fundamental, it is a mainstream understanding, because Jesus Christ himself acts as a deacon, so Mark 10, which we read, let me tell you that the bit, the key verse, Mark 10, when the two brothers James and John had said, tell you what, Master, we're the first people to think of this, we're first in the queue, so can we have the best seats when you score your ultimate victory, can we be up there next to you, and they have this curious conversation with Jesus, and then the other 10 who didn't think of that are crossed because they didn't think of it, and they get crossed with James and John and say, now we want to be in the best seats, and it's not fair of you to go and ask the master first, and Jesus says, you're all wrong, a whole lot of you are thinking completely wrongly, that's the way, the people who don't know God, that's the way they operate, that's the way the

Gentiles do it, and they have a hierarchy, and if you score the highest points, you get to tell everybody else what to do, it is the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them, and he says, not so with you, it doesn't work like that, it's not people climbing over one another's backs to get to the top, and then feeling that they're in the top place, Jesus says, if you want to be in the top place in the kingdom, you've got to learn to go down, not climbing over people's backs to get to the top, but if you want to be number one in the kingdom, you've got to learn to humble yourself, and whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, a person who excels at service is the number one person, and Jesus says, this isn't just a random thought, this is the exact principle that I am operating on myself, for even the son of man did not come to be deaconed, but to deacon, and to give his life as a ransom for many, that is so important, it is absolutely fundamental, how does salvation operate?

It operates by the saviour coming to be a servant, whatever servants do, whatever deacons do, serving, scurrying around, doing the dirty bits that nobody else wants to do, doing the chores and the tasks behind the scenes that nobody necessarily recognises, Jesus says, I came to do that, I did not come to have people do that to me, I came to do that to you lot, absolutely fundamental, it's the mentality of God in salvation, salvation, I would like to bring into play Philippians 2, which does not use the word deacon, it uses a stronger word, it uses the word *doulos*, which is not a waiter, but a slave, but I would like to try and persuade you that the principle is exactly the same, in Philippians 2, verse 5, can I just say, I think I saw somebody go along the passage at the back, was it?

Oh, was it? It was Kate, okay, no problem then, right, so Philippians chapter 2, verse 5, your attitude, so he's saying to the Christians, your mindset, your thinking, should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, you know, to say, I'm up here, what right have any of you to imagine me anywhere else than up here in glory?

[23 : 38] He says, I'm not counting that something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, and so it goes on, but that's the mentality part of it, that Jesus' own attitude was, I am prepared to serve other people, I am prepared to come from my place of comfort and luxury and having everything nice the way I want it, to a place of disorder and rubbish and things need sorting out and chores need doing, and I am prepared to do that because that's what it takes to save this lot.

God, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not count equality with God something to be clung to at all costs, but made himself nothing and took the very nature of a servant.

And he goes on to say, well what that involved involved the incarnation, it involved the cross, and it was that that God so valued.

And I'll also bring into play what we read earlier in Isaiah 42, you don't need to look that one up, where, what songs were they about Jesus Christ?

Were they the king songs or the, governor songs? They were something else weren't they? The servant songs. They're all about the servant of the Lord.

[25 : 20] Here is my servant, and it will say things like, here is my servant, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. And God so values that servant attitude.

So my point is, and this isn't biologically correct, but you see the point I'm trying to make, that selfless service is in the DNA, if you like, of the saviour.

That's not a very good illustration, but I think you know what I mean. It is fundamental to the way Jesus has approached salvation. It's fundamental to his attitude, and therefore it must be fundamental to the people of God.

God, if we haven't learned service, we haven't learned very much at all. And I'd also remind you of the bit where in John, where Jesus, knowing that he's come from the Father, and knowing that he's going to go to the Father, what does he do?

He goes and gets a towel, puts it round his waist, rolls up his sleeves, gets some water, and starts washing people's feet. I don't think table waiters usually do that.

[26 : 40] I'm not sure that's a diaconian thing. I'm not sure who would have done that, but somebody, that was a pretty menial task, and Jesus says, now I'm going to do this to you, and I want you to understand this, because it's a significant action.

I'm going to wash your feet, and he says, if I, your Lord and Master, to do this to you, then you must learn to do this to one another.

And it doesn't use the word diaconian, I don't think it uses the word service, just as washing feet, but it's the same idea, isn't it? So my first point is that serving is fundamental.

It isn't just an odd Baptist thing, it is fundamental to the gospel. Number two, it is general.

All, therefore, Christian activity of all sorts can be described as diakonia, I'll try and get it right, diakonia, it can, all sorts of stuff comes under the heading of diakonia, and it gets translated ministry and service.

[28 : 00] And funnily enough, in the course of translation, it loses the idea behind it because if you had PJ Wells Ministries Incorporated, it would sound as though it's really, you know, private jet and things like that.

it makes it sound as though it is a big business, but the word ministry is meant to be the opposite of that. The word ministry is meant to be the low doing the chores thing.

Ministry means service, being, you know, being a servant. And we use the word ministry and minister and it becomes a sort of exalted thing.

You know, the work of the ministry or the minister. I put on a Scottish voice for no particular reason. But it gives the idea this is an exalted person.

So, you know, the minister is coming to visit us today. Put out the best knives and forks. But it's all gone backwards because diakonia ministry ministry is not just the minister and it is not just the paid person who is the minister and it isn't just full-time people who do ministry.

[29 : 30] It is the Christian word for all the stuff that goes on in the church in all sorts of ways. Let me give you some examples. So, Acts chapter six 1098.

So, this is about diakonia, ministry, service, whatever waiters and people like that do.

But it's hidden in various different places here with different bits of translation. So, I'll show it to you.

In those days, Acts chapter six, when the numbers of disciples were increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews, the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

There's the word, the daily diakonia of food, the deaconing of food, handing out food, that particular activity. So, the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry, which I don't think is in the Greek there at all, to neglect the something of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

That's where the diakonia bit comes. It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God in order to deacon the tables.

[31 : 36] Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the diakonia of the word.

So, you see, it's all about deaconing, but you can deacon different things. It's all about service, but you can serve in different spheres. So, the apostles are keen to say, we have a particular sphere of the word and we want to be deaconing the word.

We want to be handing that out and making sure people get served with the word. And it is just not possible for us simultaneously to spend all our time deaconing the handout of food to the widows in the church.

It's about deaconing, all deaconing, but there's a deaconing of the word and there's a deaconing of tables. And that's Baptist churches would probably say, that's the division that helps us to

understand the difference between the work of elders and the work of the deacons.

So, the elders are the people who, like the apostles before them, have a particular responsibility for the word and prayer, and the deacons are the people who have a particular responsibility for things like making sure that everybody is looked after in this practical serving way.

[33 : 15] In this particular case, it was people who needed a food handout. That's what I understand it anyway. So, my point general here is that it's all deaconing.

It's all deaconing. 1 Corinthians 12 verses 4 to 6. Still on this point that deacon is the general word for all sorts of Christian activity.

1 Corinthians 12 4 to 6. Thank you. Ben, could you read that out with a loud voice, please?

Thank you.

Very Trinitarian. He says, whether he's deliberately saying this, I don't know, but he's saying the Spirit, the Lord, and God. So, he's thinking in a Trinitarian way, and he uses three different words to say the same thing.

[34 : 29] he says, gifts. So, the Spirit gives gifts to all sorts of people. Everybody has a spiritual gift. So, that's one word. And then he uses, at the end of it, he says, working.

So, there is the working of God in all the relationships and the activities of the church. And then the word in the middle is deaconing. There's gifts.

service. Let's say the same thing again. There's the working of God in the church. And let's say the same thing again. There's the deaconing, the service. And he's covering everything, isn't he?

He's saying it's a general way the church operates of service. Let's look at a couple of references which might be a little surprising.

In Acts chapter 11 verse 29. And this is when Paul was very concerned to help the Jewish group in Jerusalem in a time of famine and he wanted particularly the Gentile churches to show their solidarity with the Jewish group by sending financial help, sending a gift, money, to help them to buy food.

[35 : 55] This is in Acts 11 verse 29. The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. And the word diakonia is hidden in there and it's the word, help.

If I looked it up correctly it's the word help. So what they're actually saying is the financial gift was a service to these people and it was sent, this, they decided to provide this deaconing in the form of a financial gift and send it across to the brothers.

So that's surprising use of the word diakonia. It's I forgot verse 25. Yes, verse 25 of the next chapter, 12 verse 25.

When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem taking with them John also called Mark. Has anybody got a different translation for verse 25?

[37 : 11] Yes, V? Thank you. Yeah, then they had completed their service, their ministry.

And has Lindsay got anything different again? That's verse 25. When Barnabas and Saul had something, 12, 25. 25. 25.

Their ministry. Yeah, okay. Well, NIV said mission, but it was hidden under there was the idea of diakonia.

This giving of money was such a thing. And Paul can also use diakonia to mean what he means in Acts 21 verse 19.

So I'll read that one. It's a report. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his diakonia, translated ministry, and this time he doesn't mean giving money, he means preaching.

[38 : 26] So I'm just making this point several times over that it says this idea covers all sorts of things. It's a general word, it's the way that the church operates in general.

And then my third point was that it's also a particular word. And to say that having said that all sorts of things are diakonia, yet there are a particular recognized men and women in the church is called deacons.

They're not elders but they serve and presumably if they are called deacons the churches would have recognized them as such, they knew who they were and they said these are our deacons.

So presumably there were some particular ways that they were serving to distinguish them from the general service that everybody was doing and as we've already seen from 1 Timothy 3 they are

people who are not entirely dissimilar to elders in what's expected of them.

You notice there are several points of comparison 1 Timothy 3 the elder must manage his family well and the deacon must manage his family well and the elder should have an exemplary or at least a regular marriage, shouldn't be a bigamist or anything like that and likewise the deacon must be the husband of one wife and must manage his children and household well.

[40 : 13] so these people are to be spiritually mature and reliable and exemplary and one thing I meant to say was that I think it can also include ladies, women, there are lady deacons and the example of that is in Romans 16 verse 1 where it says I commend to you our sister Phoebe a servant of the church a deacon or presumably in the feminine form a deaconess of the church in Kentria and that is pretty much where I'll stop so deaconing is fundamental it's general and it's also particular we are blessed with deacons in our church they sort of serve as a team they have some particular duties allocated to them so Ray

Wingate does the work of at least three people probably many more than that does admin and secretarial tasks and treasurer tasks Roger keeps a watchful eye on care and concern looking after people Steve has a particular responsibility for publishing in the past we've had deacons who had a responsibility for outreach and evangelism we had a deaconess who had a responsibility for youth work and coordinating all that and I'm just trying to think back I can't think of any others to add to that list but that's sort of where I rest my case and open up for questions or discussion a