

The Christian is a servant

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[0 : 00] Evening folks, delighted to be with you guys again. In case you haven't met before, I'm Daniel, as Keith said. Let me just pray before we read again.

Amen. We'll be continuing in John 13, from verse 18 to the end.

Jesus said, I'm not referring to all of you, I know those whom I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the passage of Scripture, He who shared my bread has turned against me.

Sorry, I have technical issues. There we go. I'm telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly, I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, Very truly, I tell you, one of you is going to betray me. His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which one of them he meant.

[1 : 35] One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, Ask him which one he means.

Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.

Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, What you are about to do, do quickly. But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.

As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out, and it was night. When he was gone, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in him.

[2 : 41] If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give to you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. Simon Peter asked him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus replied, Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.

Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Then Jesus answered, Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Amen. So I first gave this sermon as part of a series on the Christian identity, and this part was on how Christians are servants.

[3 : 56] I wonder what comes to mind when you think of the word servant. A couple of my friends are big fans of Downton Abbey, which is all about the lord and lady of the manor, in like the landed gentry, the early 20s or something.

I've not seen it myself, you can probably tell. But one of my friends is such a big fan of the show, that it's his dream to become a butler. I don't know how you feel about that.

If I got an email from work one day saying, we've had to do some restructuring, and your new role is a butler, I'd be quite disappointed. But in this chapter, Jesus shows us that if we're Christians, we are servants of God, and servants of each other.

The Christian is a servant. So this passage in particular, teaches three big things about that. Firstly, we are servants who follow the example of Jesus Christ.

Then we are servants who are under the command of Jesus Christ, and we are servants who experience the grace of Jesus Christ. So firstly, we're servants in the example of Jesus Christ. [5 : 11] Jesus is the example servant in the Bible. He's the archetype. And if we are Christians, we recognize that even though we serve God, God first served us in the person of Jesus Christ.

In his own words, he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many. Jesus came to serve us, and thereby give us an example, so that we may serve each other. Read verse 15 with me. It says, after washing his disciples' feet, he says, I've set you an example that you should do as I've done for you.

Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Jesus says explicitly, I've given you an example.

So what servant-like qualities is Jesus exemplifying here? Well, firstly, it's his love for the people he serves.

[6 : 17] At this point in Jesus' life, he's about to leave the world. He must have had a lot on his mind. He was about to undergo the extreme penalty of crucifixion, and then he would be resurrected and return to heaven.

He was about to go through the depths of pain and sadness, and then ascend to the highest joys of heaven. And so in the midst of this, what was he thinking about?

Well, verse 1 says that he was thinking about his people. Verse 1 says that, having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end. To the very end of his life, Jesus loved his disciples, and he loved them to the fullest extent.

That's another way of understanding that phrase to the end, that he loved them to the uttermost, the fullest extent that you can love someone. And John expresses this love in a particular way.

He says, Jesus having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end. He phrases it this way to make clear that he's not only talking about the disciples then, but he's talking about all of his people for all time.

[7 : 38] If you're a believer today, you can read this passage and know that Jesus was thinking about you and that he loves you to the uttermost too. Some people say, I love you to the moon and back.

But if you believe in Jesus and he loves you from the depths of the cross to the heights of heaven, which is much further than the moon. Jesus sets an example of love.

His love was patient, selfless, and went to the uttermost through the most extreme circumstances. Secondly, he sets an example of humility.

In verse 3, John gives us a look into the mind of Jesus. It says, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

So it says that Jesus knows that he's from heaven and that all things are in his hands. he was the Son of God. I was thinking about what I might be like if I knew this about myself.

[8 : 48] I might get a bit of a power trip from that. Maybe if someone crossed me, I would say, do you have any idea who I am? The Son of God. Jesus, on the other hand, knowing that he's from heaven and that all things were in his hand, serves sinners.

He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped for his own selfish gain. Instead, as we read in verse 4, it says, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist.

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him. In the ancient Middle East, servants would show themselves to be servants by wearing minimal, simple clothes.

And one of the most humiliating duties of a servant that they'd be expected to do was to clean the feet of their masters. So when Jesus takes off his outer garment and puts on the towel, he's dressing up as a servant.

Then he takes the role of the servant by washing his disciples' feet. Jesus is not someone who, when slighted, would be thinking, do you have any idea who I am?

[10 : 15] He's not someone who would say that this person is beneath me or this act of service is beneath me. He was prepared to wrap himself in a towel and wash his disciples' feet.

He sets the example of humility by extremes. Though he was the very highest, and is the very highest, he made himself the lowest. Though he is the immortal, invisible God who wraps himself in light and is served by myriads of angels, he humbly washes the feet of those that he loves.

So how are we to respond to this? Well, firstly, we're to simply receive Jesus' service with thanksgiving and accept it.

And secondly, we must follow his example. If you read verses 6-9 with me, it says, He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you will never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part in me.

[11 : 32] Peter protests at Jesus' act of service. He doesn't feel worthy. He doesn't want to receive Jesus' service. He wants to earn it. But Peter has to accept that it's not about how he feels.

If he's going to be clean, Jesus has to do it for him. He can't do it himself. Ultimately, the act of washing of the feet points towards Jesus' death on the cross.

His extreme act of service for our forgiveness. we can't save ourselves, and we have to accept that. We have to simply receive with gratitude that Jesus has done the work of saving us on our behalf. Perhaps this is something you personally might struggle with.

Maybe life is a bit of a mess, and you feel like Jesus wouldn't help you, and that you're beneath him. Well, we must remember that he was glad to descend from heaven to die for you and forgive your sins.

[12 : 46] Romans 5 says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. If he was willing to die for us while we were still his enemies, how much more will he help us now that we're his friends? Christ. So Jesus is the example servant whose service we first must gratefully accept, and then whose pattern we have to follow.

As well as being the servant in this picture, he's also the Lord. He's the one who dishes out the commands to a servant. That's my second point. Christians are servants under the command of Jesus Christ.

verse 13 says, you call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Jesus is the teacher and Lord of his people.

They're right to call him teacher and Lord, because he came from God, and the Father has put everything in the world under the lordship and authority of Jesus. There's nothing in the world that doesn't belong to him, and there's no person in the world who won't ultimately answer to Jesus. In verse 14, we get the implication of this in this passage. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

[14 : 19] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

So that means if Jesus was humble, making himself the servant of people who didn't deserve him, who couldn't repay the favor, then we must do the same. Otherwise, we're saying with our actions that we're greater than the master when we're not.

God. Imagine being in the upper room with the disciples and Jesus that night. Jesus took off his robe, imagine him washing Peter's feet, and John's feet, and James' feet, and Andrew's feet, the disciples, and then he comes around and washes yours.

And then he says to you, now you must follow my example, you should wash each other's feet. You wouldn't think of saying, no way, would you? You wouldn't think of saying, washing feet beneath me, it would be crazy.

Who would you think you're talking to? All things are in Jesus' hands. He's God in the flesh. But sometimes we do find reasons not to follow Jesus' example.

[15 : 41] We find reasons not to serve other people. But when we realize that our Lord made himself a servant for his people while they were still sinners, all those reasons and excuses melt away.

Because no servant is greater than the master. So in a church family, we're all servants. None of us are the masters.

Do we insist on getting our own way rather than seeking the benefit of the other person? Perhaps we have less time for certain people in the church because they rub us up the wrong way.

We must follow Jesus' example instead. Thinking a bit beyond the church family, are there people out there in the world that we think are beneath us?

Are there people for whom we feel, I don't need to respect this person? Maybe it's because their politics is wrong. Or maybe they're a drain on society.

[16:51] No servant is greater than the master. And if Jesus is willing to welcome sinners and show kindness to them, working to bring them to faith, then we must do the same. Otherwise, we're saying with our actions that we're greater than the master.

father. The other thing to see is that Jesus issues his commands through his words. If you read verse 20, it says, very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.

Jesus there is talking specifically about the disciples. When they go out and evangelize and put scriptures into writing, they teach with Jesus' authority.

They speak his words. So when the apostles preached and gave commands to the churches, they did so with the authority of Christ. That's why we have all the other writings in the New Testament. What this entails is that how we respond to Jesus' commands in the Bible displays how we respond to him personally. When we listen to his word, do we do it and accept it with thanksgiving?

[18:08] Or do we try to get around it, find reasons not to obey? Remember that Jesus said, whoever receives the one I send receives me. In this particular chapter, Jesus' commands are about loving each other as a church family.

He expresses this in two ways. First in verse 14, it says, now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet, one another being your fellow believer. Then he says in verse 34, a new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. I mentioned earlier that Jesus washing his disciples' feet was pointing to how he would deal with their sins on the cross.

The washing represented how forgiveness covers over their sins and washes them away. Jesus took the extreme penalty on their behalf so that their sins would not be counted against them.

So when Jesus says to wash each other's feet, what does he mean? We're not like Jesus. We can't take away someone's sin, that was his job.

[19:30] But we can say to each other, I forgive you for what you've done against me. To wash each other's feet means that we must forgive each other and be gracious to each other.

Listen to a part of Colossians chapter 3. Put on then as God's chosen ones holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another. And if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. church needs to be a family where forgiveness is abundant, where we frequently let go of the things we have against others.

We let go of our anger at their failings. We let go of our pride to forgive people who have hurt us.

We make a special effort as God's people to forgive people in our church family.

family. And we're unable to do this because the Lord himself has forgiven us. That's what Colossians says. Our sins in God's sight have been dealt with.

[20:41] They're gone. So we can share with each other the forgiveness and grace that God has shown us. we saw earlier that Jesus is love for us.

His people is committed to the end and full of humility, willing to do the servant's job for the other person. And our love must follow that example, our love for each other. There's a part of the Westminster Confession that we follow as a church that teaches us very clearly.

It says, all saints, that's believers or Christians, are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory.

And being united to one another in love, they have communion with each other in each other's gifts, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

In other words, we're united to each other in love, and therefore obliged to serve each other. We're obliged to work for the good of other people in our church family.

[22:02] I was reflecting on this, that obliged is a strong word. It goes further than advised or suggested or recommended. An obligation is something you must do. There's also a few helpful distinctions it makes there.

It says that we're to perform public and private duties for each other. Some things we do for each other can be seen, like hospitality, having someone over for a meal.

Other things are private. People won't see you praying for them. The other distinction that's made here is looking for the needs of the inward and the outward man.

What this is meaning is the inward man is the spiritual aspect of someone's life. And the outward is the practical, physical aspect.

aspect. Maybe someone is struggling spiritually and is deflated and discouraged and needs someone to talk to and pray with them. Maybe on a physical level someone is ill and needs help or struggling financially, struggling to keep the heating on or to stop the fridge being empty.

[23 : 18] If we're to love and serve each other as Christ has commanded us to, we look to the good of both the inward and the outward person. So if we're to fulfill Christ's command to love each other, then we love each other in public and private ways and inward and outward ways.

And the wonderful thing is that because we're united to Christ, we're enabled to do this for each other. It's not just left to us. When we're a believer in Jesus, we're united to Jesus.

His life is in us and his love overflows in our hearts, reaching the people around us. In verse 35, Jesus talks about the outcome of this love for each other.

He says, by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Our love for one another shows the world that the gospel is true.

By this, all people know that you're my disciples. How will the people in this area of Edinburgh hear the gospel? They'll hear it from you guys as you tell them about Jesus and invite them to church.

[24 : 38] And how will the people in this area of Edinburgh know that that gospel you told them is true? Well, it's because they'll see the love of God in your hearts. They will see you living with faith and assurance that Jesus loves you to the uttermost, having given his life for you.

And they will see you loving each other, living in the light of the gospel. By this, all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another. Now, what happens if we fail in our service to Jesus, if we fail to follow his commands and fail to love one another properly?

The last part of the passage shows that we're servants who experience the grace of Jesus Christ.

Servants who experience the grace of Jesus Christ. I don't know how you guys feel about dogs.

I love them personally, always had them growing up. And something I noticed is that you can always tell the difference between a well-trained dog and an untrained dog. Well-trained dogs love their owners and are incredibly obedient.

When the owner says to the dog, go, he goes. And when he says return, he returns with no hesitation. There's not much thought that goes on in their minds, really.

[26 : 06] It's quite funny. But wouldn't it be wonderful if we were like that for Christ? If we would understand his commands and just do them? If we realize that, you know, God told me through his word that I need to forgive someone, so I forgave them.

No hesitation. Jesus told me to, through his word, to stop getting drunk, and so I did. Jesus told me to put off anger and malice and sexual morality, and so I have.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were like that? I was convicted writing this that I don't live up to that standard, and maybe you're feeling that too. But there's good news for servants of God who fail.

We're servants who experience the grace of Jesus who covers over our sins. In this part of John, there's two disciples who fail him that Jesus talks to in this chapter.

There's Judas and Peter. We see in Judas that doubling down on sin leads to death. I wonder if you've ever come to the realization that there's some area in your life where you're sinning against God.

[27 : 24] Maybe it's your attitude or bad habit. I think in those situations we have a choice between doubling down, pretending it's not true, covering it up, or owning up to it, confessing it to God, asking for his forgiveness and striving to change.

The story of Judas warns us against the first option, against doubling down. The Gospel of John makes clear that Judas had a problem with money.

In the chapter before, there's an incident where someone anoints Jesus with expensive perfume and it says, but Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples, he who was about to betray him, said, why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?

And John helpfully tells us that he said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief. And having charge of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put in it.

Judas loved money, and despite hearing Jesus' preaching and Jesus' teaching, he couldn't give it up. He must have heard all the things Jesus said about money, but Judas doubled down and hardened his heart, and in the end he fell away and betrayed Jesus because of his love for money.

