

Omnipotent

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[0 : 00] God is all-powerful. God is omnipotent. And to help us with that, we're going to look together at John chapter 13. So if you turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 13, on page 1081, we will read the first 17 verses.

And we'll see together how Jesus, as the all-powerful one, how he acts in that context and what that means for our own lives. So let's read together from John chapter 13. It was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world. He now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 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 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 his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 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 shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

Jesus answered, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. His whole body is clean and you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him and that was why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them.

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. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth. No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Amen. So this evening we're thinking about power. And I think many people have something of a, we could maybe call it a love-hate relationship with power. I wonder what we think of when we hear the word power. Because there are those stories that frequently make the headlines about abuse of power, where people with wealth and influence and status use that position to abuse others or to abuse their sense of privilege. We have that saying that absolute power corrupts absolutely. And we often see that reflected in the world.

Power too is one of those assets that divides us. Some people have, some people don't have. Some have power because of physical strength, because of beauty, because of money, because of charm, because of their status in society, whereas others find themselves lacking that, find themselves powerless.

[4 : 01] Perhaps when we hear the word power, we think here's a goal to aspire towards. Power that brings security, status, perhaps at a personal level, influence perhaps, and the ability to bring change in a community, in a society, in a workplace. When we think about powerful people, do we think of them as people that we admire? Or people that we are critical of? Or is it somewhere in between?

I think it's probably a love-hate relationship when it comes to our views on power because people like us who are sinful, we use power in ways that is sometimes selfless, serving others, but other times using it in a thoroughly selfish way. Sometimes power gets used in ways that are constructive and bring benefit to society. Other times power is used in really destructive ways that are harmful in families and societies. And so the book that we've kind of been thinking about over the last few weeks, Jen Wilkins' book, None Like Him, she has a really helpful quote where she says, whatever power we possess, we face the choice of whether we use it for the benefit of others or abuse it for

selfish gain. Because we all have some degree of power and influence.

And so we have a question, will I act like a steward? This has been given to me by God, therefore I'm going to use it for the good of others and for His glory. Or will I act like this is mine? I'm an owner of this status? I'll self-promote and I'll seek to glorify myself.

That's us when it comes to power. We possess some, but we are not all powerful. But God is. We can think, for example, in Revelation chapter 19, Revelation is full of songs, the songs of heaven. And in Revelation chapter 19, one of the songs of heaven says, Hallelujah, salvation and glory and power belong to our God. Hallelujah for our Lord God Almighty reigns.

[6 : 25] Now here's a significant thing. The hosts of heaven, they love the fact that God is all powerful. We might be cautious about people that exercise a lot of power. Perhaps we are cautious about the idea of God being all powerful. But those in heaven, they love that reality. And it's because they know God.

It's because they know that God's power is tied up with His goodness and His love. So we began reading in Psalm 113, God is exalted over all the earth. But God is also the one who raises the poor from the dust heap. God is not one who abuses His power. Rather, He uses His power to show love and grace to others. And we see this really clearly in John chapter 13. That's why we're going to spend some time this evening in this chapter. Jesus revealing His power. But before we get there, we need to think about the context. So the first question that we need to ask ourselves is, when is Jesus' power revealed? Now look with me at verses 1 and 2, and we'll find the background to what's going on. Now there's a crucial phrase, second sentence in verse 1, Jesus knew that the time had come. Literally, that means the hour had come. It's probably more helpful to think about it as the hour. It's a big theme in John's gospel. Right at the time of His first miracle in John chapter 2, we discover that Jesus lived conscious of this hour that was coming. So He was at a wedding in Cana, and they run out of wine, and Mary came to Jesus asking for help. And He said, why do you come to me? My hour has not yet come. So at the very beginning of His public ministry, He's aware of this time, this hour. And then as we move through John's gospel, we see increasing opposition from the Jewish people. And then in John chapter 12 and verse 23, we discover this thing. We discover on the one hand that the Jewish leaders have rejected Jesus. They're plotting to kill Him. But then some Greeks come, and they say, we want to see Jesus. And it's at that point, Jesus then says, my hour has come. There's something in this moment that sparks the hour. Now, what does that refer to? And I think there are some clues, some pointers for us in our passage as to what the hour meant for Jesus. The first phrase there in verse 1, it was just before the Passover feast. Now, the Passover feast was celebrated every year by the Jews, a reminder of the first Passover, when God provided a Passover lamb who was killed so that the angel of death, the angel bringing God's judgment, might pass over the houses of the Israelites so that ultimately they might be delivered to freedom from Egypt. So when John the Baptist announced Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry, he pointed to Jesus and said, here's the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus comes to be the Passover lamb that through his death, through him shedding his own blood, there is freedom, there is life through his sacrifice. So his hour brings us to this time where Jesus will sacrifice himself for his people. And what John realizes is that when Jesus washes the feet of the disciples, he's preparing the way for a greater washing. When Jesus on the cross will wash away the sin of all those who will put their faith in him. So his hour is connected to this time of sacrifice, but it's also connected to a time of spiritual battle. Look at verse 2 and we'll see this. So the evening meal was being served and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. So Jesus's hour is when a conspiracy of evil takes place. We find the devil prompting Judas to betray Jesus.

Here are the forces of darkness lining up against Jesus in his suffering, heading towards his death on the cross. And again, this is a theme that you can trace through the Gospels. There are in a sense two phases to the way the devil looks to attack Jesus and stop his mission. So the first phase is the devil trying to stop Jesus getting to the cross. And we see that really early in Jesus's life.

[11 : 35] Think about what happens with King Herod. King Herod, the evil king, tries to kill the newly born King Jesus. That's the devil's influence trying to stop Jesus' ministry from beginning.

And then the first thing that happens in Jesus' public ministry is the temptation in the wilderness. And again, the devil comes to Jesus trying to throw him off the path of obedience to God, leading to the cross, telling him there's another way to be a king.

Why don't you ask me and you can gain power and influence another way? And Jesus says no at all points. So that was phase one, stop Jesus getting to the cross. Well, here we find phase two of the devil's attack. And this time he seeks to bring the cross about by Satan's will, not by Jesus' obedience.

He tries to throw everything into this to get the religious leaders, to get the Jews, to get the Romans, to get Judas all together to try and take over the cross. So that it's about Satan's will rather than God's will and Jesus' obedience. And we discover that he fails in both attacks. But what we recognize is that Jesus comes as God's king, bringing the kingdom of God, and as a result, he comes to put himself deliberately in total opposition to Satan. Jesus comes to dethrone the devil, to defeat the devil, and that climaxes, of course, at the cross. And so again, that spiritual battle is part of Jesus' hour.

Another part of this hour is the fact that Jesus is returning to God. Verse one, Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. And again in verse three, Jesus knew that he'd come from God and was returning to God. So this hour that John speaks about is part of this journey of Jesus' journey of Jesus from the glory of heaven to humbling himself to come into this world, to then going lower still in his death on the cross and the humiliation and the suffering that that brought before resurrection, exaltation, return to glory at the Father's right hand. [14:17] So part of the hour is his return to glory as the obedient son. And we see that even at the cross. Returning to God is the conquering Savior who'd come on a rescue mission and had successfully carried out that rescue mission. Returning to God as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. So this is all part of the hour.

There's sacrifice, there's battle, there's movement of return to glory, and there's also love. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. So when we think about this hour, when we think about cross and resurrection and return to glory, all of that is framed by the love of Jesus for the world. So having said that this is the context, now we're going to see how Jesus reveals his power at the climax of his mission. What will that demonstration of his power be like? How will the all-powerful Son of God react to the situation that he finds himself in? And for that, we'll need to think about what motivated Jesus and to see how Jesus redefines power and what happens here. So let's think secondly about how does Jesus redefine power for us? So from verse 3 to verse 13. And again, it's really important for us to notice that John is very clear on the identity of Jesus. Verse 3, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, that he'd come from God and was returning to God. So he's very clear when we think about this foot washing, it's a foot washing performed by the Son of God, the one who has all things under his power, the one who has all things under his power. So how will the all-powerful Son of God use his power?

Well, what he told in verse 1, his motivation is love. He uses his power to demonstrate absolute love for his people. He loves his own to the fullest extent. He shows total love because he loves his own people today. John is writing here reflecting back on the events of the life of Jesus. He's reflecting back on this meal. He's reflecting back on the foot washing. And he now sees that Jesus is anticipating the cross. And so John understands that this is a signpost to the total love that Jesus is going to show for his own by dying on the cross for us. So what happens next? How does the all-powerful Son of God use his power? What might we expect? We might expect that he would perhaps name and shame

Judas. He knew Judas. He knew Judas was going to betray him. We might expect sudden judgment of Judas. We might expect the devil to be destroyed in a display of incredible power. But that's not what we find.

[17:52] Instead, the all-powerful Lord of the universe takes up the position of the lowest servant. Verse 4, So 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 his disciples' feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him. Now, culturally, it was okay, it was accepted that you could wash the feet of a superior. That was an important way culturally to show respect for somebody. But you would never do that for a peer, somebody who was equal to you. And certainly, you would not see a superior doing that for someone that was less than them. And in actual fact, a Jewish servant would not be expected to do this kind of job because it would seem to be so low and so shameful. But here is Almighty Jesus, the Son of God, and he's dealing with the dust and the dirt

and the dung of the road on his disciples' feet.

Here is the most powerful person in the room, who is at the same time the most powerful person in the universe, lovingly adopting the position of a servant to wash his friend's feet.

Now, again, it's important for us to remember that the disciples knew very well that Jesus had power. They had been with him since the beginning of his public ministry. They'd seen him turn water to wine.

They'd been with him when he calmed a storm, when he healed lepers, when he raised the dead. And they'd heard his teaching and knew that it was unique because he spoke with the authority of God.

[19 : 56] And verse 13 makes clear that Jesus is still their teacher and that he is still the Lord.

That's the same Greek word for God in the Greek Old Testament. So Jesus is not giving up his power.

Jesus has not somehow lost his power. Rather, he is redefining power for us. And in a sense, this foot washing is a pattern that we can trace through Jesus' life.

Because Jesus had all the glory of heaven, but he left all that glory behind to take on human flesh. Jesus gave up his life as he took our sin to become our savior.

Jesus redefines power because he uses it to love and to serve. For Peter, for Simon Peter here, this is something truly shocking.

[21 : 07] So we see that dialogue between Peter and Jesus in verses 6 to 10. For Peter, there's a sense of social order and cultural expectations and also understanding of the identity of Jesus as the Son of God.

They've just been completely turned upside down. So when he says, you shall never wash my feet, he's saying the Christ of God cannot become my servant. The Son of God can't be the person that washes feet.

How does Jesus apply? You do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet.

And Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Jesus' words here are making plain that the foot washing is speaking about something beyond itself.

It's a sign pointing to something greater. Jesus is saying to Peter, you must be willing to let me wash you. You must be willing to let me serve you if you're to have any part in my kingdom.

[22 : 10] We must be willing to let Jesus serve us. Not to wash our feet, but to become our suffering servant. To live a life of perfect obedience that we can't.

And then to die as our representative for the sins that we have committed. We need to be willing to accept that washing. That Jesus deliberately, lovingly, willingly goes low, goes under the judgment of God for our sin.

So that you and I might be free. The Lamb of God, Jesus is saying, must wash our sin. He must be able to use his power to serve us by winning that decisive victory at the cross for us.

Or we can have no place in God's family. So again, to use the language of Don Carson, the revered and the exalted Messiah assumes the role of the despised servant for the good of others.

This is how Jesus redefines power. And this is what makes him someone to love and trust. He has all the power in the world, but he doesn't abuse that power.

[23 : 33] However, he chooses to serve others with that power. Jesus uses his power to work ultimate good for those like us who are weak and powerless.

And he does that fully conscious of his position. He knows that he's from God and he's returning to God. And it's because he's so secure, knowing that he is loved by his Father, knowing that he's pursuing the will of his Father, determining to seek the glory of his Father, that security gives him freedom to go low, to serve others, not to hang on to power or status, not to fight for political power that people wanted to give to him.

He freely, joyfully serves and dies for his own. And all the while, without giving up his power for a moment, his lordship and his power remain absolute.

So we think about the drama of the cross. When all the enemies of Jesus are raging against him, when he could actually have saved himself, he deliberately chose not to, instead showing the full extent of his love.

So that's how Jesus redefines power. What does it mean for our use of power? Look at verse 14 onwards.

[25 : 02] Jesus says, So what is the example that Jesus gives?

Is it that we should wash one another's feet? So you'll find religious groups that have that practice of a ritual that's perhaps annual or quarterly.

And it may look like that, but that's not all that's talking about. I read a few months ago about a church plant in San Francisco.

San Francisco is one of those cities that has some of the most influential and wealthy people in the world, but also some people who are really deprived and powerless and homeless. And there was a church plant that was going onto the streets and seeking to serve the homeless community by giving hair washes, by giving haircuts, and also by washing people's feet, a practical expression of care for their needs.

So it may look like that, but it goes deeper than just a ritual. It's an attitude of humility and helpfulness towards others.

[26 : 25] It's an attitude where we're holding on to our status lightly, where we're willing to use whatever power and influence we have for the sake of others, where we're willing to go low for the sake of others.

So that we recognize that power is not an end in itself. Power is not to be used simply for ourselves. Rather, as those who would follow Jesus, we're called to use our power to restore and redeem. And so we need to think for ourselves, what does that look like in our lives?

You know, if we have influence, for example, in our workplaces, how can we use that influence to care for those who are around us, perhaps those who are under us?

Are there ways where, in our work, we can look to serve those who are poor or weak or lonely? If we have the power of popularity or influence in school or university or in our community, will we use that in Jesus' name to make sure that the weak or the awkward or the ignored or the new people can find a welcome?

[27 : 48] As a church, where we look to serve both those who are inside and outside the church in order to restore dignity, in order to meet basic needs, in order to express the love of God to others.

Whatever power or influence we have, Jesus demonstrates for us the way that we should use it.

Since the Lord of the universe gave a footpath to his followers, since the almighty Son of God gave his own life for his friends, since the all-powerful King Jesus holds us safe now and for all eternity, we can freely and joyfully make ourselves nothing to serve others, to use power, perhaps in surprising ways, in counter-cultural ways, to care for the weak and to bring glory to God.