

# Service

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[0:00] I'd like to give a little bit of an introduction to this talk this morning. After the introduction we're going to sing and then we'll go into the main message. So we're doing a series of messages on Sunday mornings about the issues of church membership.

We had a workshop to address this topic because we feel that church membership is absolutely critical and important for every Christian.

If you are a Christian person you need to belong to a visible local body of Christian people. You need to say these are my brothers and sisters in Christ.

These are the people who I am family with. And we've been thinking about the implications, various aspects of church membership. And this morning I want to talk about the issue of service.

It's a lovely thing when people come to us and they say I would love to be a member of this church. And quite often their question might be what can I do?

[1:04] How can I serve? And it's a good question. I've been reading the last chapters of the book of 1 Chronicles in the Old Testament.

And it's very interesting to see all the ways in which inside the kingdom of King David there was allocations of responsibility, many, many tasks to be done.

Everybody had a job to do. Even to be in charge of camels and donkeys, which I thought was a wonderful thing. They appointed people officially inside the kingdom of King David and said you are in charge of the donkeys.

But there were also people there who had to be priests and singers and gatekeepers and soldiers and leaders. And in any church situation, ours included, inside the kingdom of Jesus Christ, there is plenty to be done.

And I have a list here on the right hand side. And it's not exhaustive. And I make no attempt to sort of prioritize or emphasize anything in particular. Just to say that all these things have to be done within any church setting.

[2:18] The churches we've just been praying for in this church here. There is praying. There is transport. There's cooking. There's visiting. There's admin. There's cleaning. There's caring. There's one-to-one work. Bible studies.

Looking after money. And there's children's work. And all of that happens throughout the week and throughout the years. And people are equipped to do that because God gives gifts in his church. And that's going to be the subject of another Sunday morning message. But having said all of that, it's not best to start with these lists when we have a scripture like the one that we're going to be looking at this morning.

Because service has to start with a servant heart. Service has to start with a servant heart. A servant attitude. And that is the reason why we're going to be looking this morning at this particular Bible reading which is in the Gospel of John chapter 13.

[3:24] In most of the Bibles you've had from the church, the back of the church is on page 108. So if you can find that, please do.

Because you'll need to be able to follow the words inside the Bible. John chapter 13. This is a kind of pivot point in the Gospel of John.

Chapters 1 to 12. We've heard about three years of public ministry of Jesus Christ. And how he has been speaking and acting towards people.

Embedded in that time, there has been the calling of 12 disciples. 12 followers.

12 learners of Christ. And as we come to the end of this Gospel. Chapters 13 to the very end of John.

[4:40] We suddenly find the focus of Jesus' ministry is back with these 12. So, we find here a very natural connection.

As we begin to talk about what it is to be inside the church. Because these were his own followers. This was not the world. This was the followers of Jesus Christ.

And these are the ones whom he is going to talk to in John chapter 13 and onwards. We're going to read that it is just before the Passover feast.

Here in verse 1. It was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

That is such an amazing verse. Jesus knew that the time had come.

[5:52] Earlier on in John, other gospel accounts, it says again and again. Jesus knew his time had not yet come.

But now we come to John chapter 13, verse 1. Jesus knew his time had come. It was time to leave this world. It was time to go back to his Father.

He has hours to live before he dies upon the cross. And he knows it. And it says, knowing that he was about to leave the world and go back to his Father, having loved his own who were in the world, these disciples, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

things are now getting very, very, very serious for Jesus. He just has hours before the crucifixion.

And it's almost like he wants to be very careful in everything that he does and is about. He wants to sum up the kind of relationship that he has with his own disciples.

[7:31] He's loved them. He's loved them from the beginning. And it says, now he shows them the full extent of his love.

So this should get our attention. As we read verses 2 to 17, this should get our attention.

How do you think Jesus is going to show the full extent of his love? The clock is ticking. How is he going to show just how much he loves them?

What could he do? So let's read. It was just before the Passover feast.

Jesus knew that 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.

[8:35] 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.

[9:44] 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 him. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

[10:54] 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.

May God bless his word to us. This morning, we're going to stay sitting as we pray by means of a song, which is this one here, 563.

Speak, Lord. This passage is about washing feet.

The washing of feet is an important mark and measure of the extent of Jesus' love for his disciples. Do you remember what we just looked at? Verse one.

[12:18] Jesus now wanted to show them the full extent of his love. And so, he gets up from the table, takes off his outer garment, puts on around his waist the towel.

He is now garbed like a servant. Gets down on his knees one by one. He washes the feet of his feet.

For us, the idea of washing of feet is strange, weird, even comical.

It's not part of our culture. It's not part of our culture. We don't do it. And so, if we're going to get any benefit from this particular passage, we need to recognize what is going on here and the significance of it for a Jewish person living in the first century.

Because, for them, it is not weird or strange or unusual.

[13:31] It's common. It's an expected aspect of hospitality. Dusty roads, dusty feet, open sandals.

You go into any house and set before you would be the bowl, the towel, opportunity for either you to wash your own feet or for a servant in the household to wash your feet.

And by the way, it is the very lowest task of any servant in first century Israel to wash someone else's feet.

So, what is happening at this particular moment and described in this passage that we have read is actually not unusual in terms of its practice.

But there is a strangeness and a difference about this story. Which is why those disciples were either stunned into silence or, true to type, like Peter, blurt out, Lord, you're not going to wash my feet.

[15:00] The first thing, and it's quite interesting, is that this washing of feet does not happen when it would normally happen. It should happen at the beginning.

It should happen on entry into the room. But it doesn't happen that way. We read in this passage, the evening meal was being served.

Verse 2. The evening meal was being served. They're sitting down, or rather, they're lying down around the meal. And Jesus interrupts that process to do what he does.

It happens after the meal has started. So he got up, verse 4. He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothes, he got 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. None of them had done this.

[16:13] The water had not been poured. The bowl was not ready. So he now does it after the beginning of the meal. And Jesus is making a very deliberate point.

This is normal, but it's not normal. And of course, the biggest point of all is this, that Jesus himself does the washing and the drying.

Not just providing the water and the towel for them, saying, here you are, go ahead, which would have been absolutely acceptable, but doing it all himself.

The job of the lowliest servant. So a very normal, humdrum, everyday event is suddenly and beautifully changed for their benefit and for ours because it is recorded.

It's recorded for us. There's something for us to learn from it. And it's an action which is sort of rich with very solemn, revealed words and thoughts.

[17:33] An action with solemn, revealed words and thoughts. John, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is given insight into how Jesus was thinking at that particular moment.

Jesus knew the time had come. He knew he was going to go to his Father. He knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

He didn't say that openly to his disciples, but John knew it by the power of the Holy Spirit and it's recorded for us. But there are things that he does say to his disciples and those are the things that we're going to particularly focus on.

this morning. So this action here is very solemn. How Jesus Christ dignifies the very smallest things of life.

I go back to that question put just a few minutes ago. You asked that question, having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

[18:51] What's he going to do? What's Jesus going to do? He chooses to wash their feet. Please look at verses 6 to 9.

Verses 6 to 9. Jesus came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? He says what the others would have felt. It is not right for Jesus to be playing the part of the lowliest servant. But, of course, this is about more than washing feet.

So Jesus says, verse 7, you do not realize now what I'm doing. Anybody can say, I see perfectly well what you're doing.

You're washing your feet. Washing my feet. Jesus says, you don't realize what I'm really doing. But later, you will understand.

[20:21] Peter still doesn't get it. No, says Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me.

Wow. This has got to be more than just the physical act of washing someone's feet. Jesus is now making this a very serious test of his relationship.

relationship. The relationship of Peter with Jesus is depending upon Peter's understanding of what is just taking place. It's not just about washing feet.

If you don't let me wash you, says Jesus, you have no part with me. You have no relationship with me. unless I wash you, you have no part with me.

Peter's not understanding this, but Jesus is very, very plain that what is actually happening there has a far greater significance, which Peter will understand later, but which we need to understand now.

[21:48] to be identified with Jesus Christ, you need to be washed by him.

And to be washed by him means that you need to let him serve you. So here I'm saying to everybody here today, every one of us today, to be washed by Jesus Christ is to be identified with him and we must, we must let Jesus serve us.

You might say that, that's a rather strange way, a strange way of thinking about what it is to have a relationship with Jesus.

surely the most important thing is that somehow I serve him. That's not the starting point. The starting point is this, that we need to be willing for Jesus to serve us.

Which is why Jesus says to Peter, you must let me wash your feet. need to is absolutely crucial.

[23:19] We need to be willing to be served by Jesus Christ. Because in just a few hours time, the bowl and the towel will be removed and Jesus will be further stripped and hung upon a cross.

Now this is serious because he's going to die upon the cross. And as he is taking the bowl and the feet and the washing and the drying, he's thinking of that cross.

He's thinking of the cross. The cross he's going to be nailed to in just a few hours time. He's thinking of the words that he himself has said.

For even the Son of Man himself did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. the cross is a supreme sign of Jesus Christ serving us, the fulfillment of his life mission.

Peter needed the Lord Jesus Christ to be upon the cross for him and every single one of us needs to recognize when Jesus is on the cross he is serving us.

[25:00] He's doing something for us. He is not giving us an example on the cross that we might just follow and be crucified ourselves. He's doing it because no one else could do it.

He's serving us because no one else can serve us and no one else can save us. And this is very hard for us to accept just as it was very hard for Peter to accept Jesus washing his feet.

It is very hard for us to accept Jesus on the cross dying for us in our place. I look around this room and I count a dozen different cultures and when I say it's very hard for us to accept this idea of Jesus serving us I'm not thinking of British reserve I'm thinking of every single continent and nation and culture where the idea is that we must serve God we must do something for God we must say something to God that's what God is looking for and throughout human history you see the

reflection of that in every form of religious practice to either placate or to please God to either do something for him because he's angry or to give something to him to make him happier so that he might do something for us and Jesus rips up that rule book and says you've got it all wrong you can never do enough you can never do enough to make God stop being angry with you you can't do it you are so damaged by your sin that it's not in you to be able to make such an offering that God will accept and this is the overwhelming reason why Jesus left heaven sent by his father he came from God why did he come he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many because there was nobody else who could do it only he could do it only he the perfect one could do it only he who always pleases

God could do it there was only one person who could have been on that cross whom God would have been satisfied with so that he could pour out his anger upon Jesus the anger that you and I deserve and be satisfied the price is paid well we praise God for his wonderful provision of this unique saviour there is no other saviour no other name you're extremely privileged to be here today to hear the name of Jesus who is the only saviour and my plea my earnest request of you would be this please do not try to offer a sacrifice to

[28:51] God this morning God has made his own sacrifice and he offers it to you that sacrifice is Jesus Christ and we must if we are to start on the Christian life and if we are to carry on the Christian life we must let Jesus Christ serve us are we willing to serve us Jesus to serve us this is grace grace is God's undeserved favour to us we don't deserve it we can never deserve it but God is a God of grace and he gives that grace to us in Jesus Christ this is what grace means and this is what grace demands grace if you try to add anything to it it's no longer grace it's your work next we are firstly servants of

God those who are willing to be served by Jesus Christ become like him servants of his father verse one Jesus knew the time would come for him to leave this world and go to the father verse three Jesus knew the father had put all things under his power that he had come from God and was returning to God Jesus life is only explainable with reference to the fact that it was completely lived in the presence of and in active submission to his heavenly father Jesus did what he did because that's what his father wanted him to do please look at chapter 12 verses 49 and 50 Jesus speaking I did not speak of my own accord but the father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it

I know that his command leads to eternal life so whatever I say is just what the father has told me to say Jesus said what he said because that's what his father wanted him to say and he knew the significance of it because the words he said lead to eternal life just think of that that you should live a life where every word that you say is what the heavenly father wants you to say and Jesus says that's exactly who I am and what I do he is the supreme servant of God the one who had been promised has now arrived and we see him in flesh doing and saying and thinking everything that his father wants him to do the learner of

Jesus Christ the one who has received the service of Jesus Christ the one who has been washed not by water but by his blood is now a servant of God Jesus father and our father that's why he calls his brethren he calls his brothers because just as he has that relationship with his father so have we a relationship with his father!

how can I please you do you realize just how wonderful it is to be able to even think like that but that's the work of God in Jesus Christ when we receive his grace we are changed within so that we begin to think thoughts that we never had before how can I please you and we are able to say that by his grace and we are able to do that in his strength we are then servants of one another there is an inevitable connection between our serving

[34:29] God and serving one another in fact if the first is not in place the service is useless and if a second is not in place there is no evidence that we belong to God at all if there's no serving of one another you are right to doubt whether you have received the grace of God there's an inevitable connection between being servants of God serving one another how do we show that we love God by loving one another how do we show that we serve God by serving one another so I might say at this point it's a most dangerous thing for any

Christian person to think that they should not be intimately involved in a church it's the most dangerous thing for anybody to say I'm a servant of God but have no intimate relationships in service in terms of service with your brothers and sisters in a local church so that's why we say this is not optional this is absolutely necessary and it pleases God so Jesus makes the feet washing intensely practical an example for all time and every generation it's not just about washing feet I draw your attention to verse 14 now that I your Lord and teacher have washed your feet you also should wash one another's feet

I've set you an example for you that you should do as I have done for you and he repeats it again and strengthens it by verse 16 I tell you the truth no servant is greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him don't second guess what Jesus is saying here don't reinterpret it don't throw the message back in the messenger's face sorry rather the person who sent the message don't say you didn't really mean that Jesus is saying no you just do what you're told to do I'm your master and you should do what you've been told to do I've given you the message do it this is unquestionable and unavoidable we are to be a people whose every action in relation to one another has the picture of feet washing applied to it now there's some really big implications and applications now very big we are to serve rather than expect to be served that's pretty counter cultural in this world in our consumerist society to have the attitude that says my first obligation and my default thinking is how can

I serve how can I serve you nothing is too menial or insignificant nothing is too menial or insignificant this is the extent of Jesus love this is what he chose to demonstrate his love by we will we will I think these things come out naturally from the word but they come with enormous challenge we will take initiatives to serve not waiting until others are doing this Jesus did not wait for anybody else to get up from the table and to do what he went and did here in church life we don't have to look around all the time and think if somebody else isn't doing it then I'm not going to do it God calls you to do something you should do it and take initiatives to do so he will do our service well how did

Jesus wash his disciples feet he did it well I think he probably did it excellently!

[39:35] as he did all things we will serve willingly and wholeheartedly because we want to Jesus really wanted to wash the feet of his disciples we will love each other more and more Jesus had been with his disciples for three close years he knew them well all their little ways mannerisms character traits failings but unlike us familiarity did not breed weariness or lack of respect but increasing love in fact Paul tells the Philippians that they should count others better than themselves brothers and sisters isn't that hard when we know each other so well it doesn't seem so hard to love people when you've just known them for a few months it can be quite hard to love people after a few years when you just know the way they are you know the things that irritate you about them and you know the things that you cause them to be irritated by you it's all an open book but

I love this in Jesus he doesn't do it at the start of his ministry he does it at the very end when he knows them he knew all about them and it says this is how he wanted to show the full extent of his love he got better and better in terms of his love for them and we will serve indiscriminately and without distinction Jesus washed the feet of Thomas who would doubt he washed the feet of Peter who would deny him and he washed the feet of Judas who would betray him and I think he washed their feet beautifully and without reservation and we will be surprising in our service doing something that we've never done before astonishing people and that's good isn't it and isn't it good that we've heard these things but oh we've got verse 17 we've not read verse 17 in this particular message yet and what does

Jesus say there now that you know these things you'll be blessed if you do them it's not the knowing that gives the blessing it's the doing there's no blessing in going away from this message feeling encouraged and warm in heart if this does not lead you and me to serving feet washing like actions in fact in action not doing these things will put us in a place of disobedience so if you consider yourself to be a disciple of Christ set alongside and with other disciples of Christ if you are a member of this church set alongside other members of this church well what a privilege to follow Jesus example what a high calling but what a privilege and we need to end in prayer and

I've tried to speak this message to myself and I find my immediate response is real sorrow because I don't think I wash people's feet like Jesus I don't think I have those attitudes that I've suggested come out of this feet washing I don't think I'm indiscriminate I don't think I love people more and more I don't feel that my sacrifice is surprising I imagine you might feel that way as well and I'd like to be sorrowful before God and repentant but I'd also like to be encouraged because this word is here for us for our encouragement Jesus does never tell us to do things that he will not give us the grace and strength to do

Jesus never tells us to do things that he will not give us the grace and strength to do so as always we go down the path of repentance and trust repentance and trust and this is the moment where we need to repent because we have fallen short of his calling and to trust so that in a fuller way the likeness of Jesus Christ might be seen in us what a testimony to the world to see the body of Christ in practice like that two or three people like to respond in prayer now and

[45:55] I'll finish