

The servant-king

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. If we haven't met, I'm Alistair. It's very nice to meet you and Happy New Year to you all.

Today, we're starting a new series in John's Gospel, an eyewitness account of Jesus' life. But before we get into that, I just want to ask a few questions. Why should we follow Jesus? We face so many different pressures in life, pressures to ignore Jesus. But following Jesus can come at a cost of time, money, success, reputation.

And we face perplexing things such as illnesses, injustice, death. Even this morning, everything seemed to go wrong in our house.

Why do these things happen? Can we really trust that Jesus is in charge? And the right one to be following. And if we are following Jesus, what should we expect our lives to look like?

[1 : 20] What does it look like to faithfully follow Jesus? To give Jesus the honour and glory he deserves? To be faithful witnesses for Jesus in our lives? This is an important question, not only to live faithfully for him, but also to give us greater, deeper assurance and joy in our lives.

As we live the kind of lives he's called us to. As we start this new series in John's Gospel, this eyewitness account of Jesus' life, we come to a turning point in Jesus' ministry, in his life.

And today's passage gets to the very heart of these questions. We come to a turning point. Jesus is at a really high point in his ministry. If you take a look down at the page before, in 12 verse 19, The religious teachers, the Pharisees said to one another, See, this is getting us nowhere.

Look how the whole world has gone after him. The religious teachers are acknowledging everyone is going after Jesus. He's performed many miraculous signs and wonders in public.

He's healed the sick. He's turned water into wine. He's fed more than 5,000 people at once. With just five loads of bread and two fish.

[2 : 46] And he's even raised someone from the dead. And people weren't stupid. These things didn't normally happen. And as a result, the crowds are going after him. And they want Jesus to be their king.

And you can understand why, right? When someone has that kind of a power and authority of God that he's demonstrated, surely he can restore all that's wrong with the world.

Why would you not follow him? But things are about to change. Just take a look at verse 1 of chapter 13. It was just before the Passover festival, Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave the world and go to the Father.

See, Jesus hour had come for him to die, to depart from the world, to die on a cross, publicly humiliated. And when his disciples see this, they would be rightly asking the question, is following Jesus really worth it?

Why should we accept him as our king? Surely if he was the one with all power and authority, he wouldn't have let himself be humiliated and killed like this.

[4 : 01] And it's because of this impending moment, that on the night before Jesus would be betrayed and killed, he turns away from the public eye to teach those he loves, to prepare his disciples for what is about to come.

To help them and us understand why we should follow him, despite the outward appearance of the cross.

And to show them and us the kind of life we are called to live, if we truly grasp who Jesus is and what he's done for us. And he does it by leaving them and us an example.

And the example is this. Let's just read from verse one again.

It was just before the Passover festival, Jesus knew the hour had come for him to leave the world and go to the father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

[5 : 15] The evening meal was already in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the father had put all things under his power and he had come from God and was returning to God.

Just think for a moment, that last bit we just read there, verse three, what that really means, if that is true. Jesus knew that the father put all things under his power.

This is an acknowledgement that Jesus really has complete power over everything, as a king over the universe. Whatever Jesus wants to do, he can do.

Nothing is beyond him. The stars in the sky, every cell in our bodies, every human ruler, all of nature, all things are in his hands.

I was trying to think of what might be a way of thinking about this. Well, for Jesus, it's like he's got a remote control that can control the universe.

[6 : 26] Simply press a button and whatever he wants to do happens. Now, we do that with a television control, but how much more that power Jesus has that simply, if I want something to happen, it happens.

And do you see the staggering thing here? Jesus knows this. Now, how would you expect someone with this kind of power and authority to act, to bring wars around the world to an end, end the climate crisis, bring an end to oppression in the world?

And how excited would you be as one of his followers, having seen all his power and authority on display, contemplating the prospect of such glory? But that's what makes what happens next so shocking.

Jesus is God's king, yet he became a slave, a servant for those he loves. Take a look down at verse four and five.

So knowing God the Father put all things in his hand, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around his waist, and 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.

[7 : 58] Now, it's easy to miss how shocking this is in our current culture, because foot washing isn't something we do. But in the culture of first century Palestine, and indeed many countries today, washing people's feet was a way of showing hospitality and honour to guests.

Since during the day you'd be out wearing sandals on dusty roads and your feet would get covered with dirt. And you can imagine they'd need washing regularly. But you can imagine this is not a very nice task either.

Just think about your sweaty, smelly, stinky shoes after a long walk in the muddy fields or in the hot of summer when you've been out for a run.

And so consequently, this was not something that people of high honour and status in a household would do. But it was normally reserved to someone of low status, a household servant or slave.

And this is what's so shocking. Because despite Jesus knowing he is a king, not just any king, the king of the universe, God's king, he's acting like a slave, a servant.

[9 : 16] I try to think, what is a modern day equivalent of this? Well, you can imagine it's a bit like perhaps the king or Kistama, the prime minister, saying, I'm going to come and clean your toilets, your personal household toilets.

That's kind of a bit like what's going on here. Jesus takes off his outer garments to identify himself as a slave. And then he gets down and acts like a slave by washing his disciples' feet.

Do you see how shocking this is? Well, Peter certainly does. Take a look at verse 6 with me. Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

Peter is horrified. This is surely not fitting of the king. It's meant to be the other way around. We are your servants.

We're meant to show you honour. So this should make us ask the question, why would God's king do this? Why would he humble himself and humiliate himself like this?

[10 : 32] This is one of the big questions the world asks. Well, take a look at verse 7. Jesus replied, you do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

What this shows us is what Jesus was doing was a picture. The foot washing was a picture, not to be taken literally.

The feet washing itself is meant to point Peter and us to something greater that Jesus was about to do. And we see clues throughout this passage of exactly what that is.

Verse 1, Jesus said, he knew that his hour had come. It was also the time of the Passover festival and people would remember how God saved his people through a sacrifice.

And verse 2, Judas is about to betray Jesus. Jesus. See, when Jesus says, afterwards you will understand, he's talking about the cross, his death on the cross, where Jesus supremely humbles himself, becomes a servant to deal with our greatest problem, to cleanse us from the dirt that we have accumulated in our lives.

[11:59] You see, really all of us are a bit like this. We're a bit like this muddy footballer. All of the times that we don't think things, do things, say things that we should have done.

All the ways we've dishonoured God. And you imagine this person trying to come to a wedding, trying to come and say, hey, come hug, hug the bride and groom. Welcome me. How much of a dishonour would that be to the bridegroom and the bride? We cannot approach God like this. We need to be made clean.

If we stay like this, we face separation from God and judgment. But that's why the cross is such good news. At the cross, Jesus takes the responsibility for our dirt.

He makes us clean so that we can share in His everlasting glory and life. But Jesus' death on the cross was not only to cleanse us, but also to display His astonishing love.

[13:15] Verse 1 says, having loved His own who are in the world, He loved them to the end. Now imagine you are some victim of some horrible crime.

All the evidence is clear that the criminal is about to be convicted. But then you say to the criminal, the person who severely hurt you and your family, I'll take the blame.

Let that criminal go through. Through the foot washing and through the cross, Jesus displays His astonishing love for those who trust Him.

Because Jesus takes our place. But there's also another thing. Jesus washes His disciples' feet to show Him, to show us that His death and humiliation is no accident.

to show us that it's the very purpose for which He came. I think it's why John makes such a big deal of Judas being about to betray Jesus.

[14:27] Here in chapter 13, it's the first time we see Jesus actually predict Judas' betrayal. and He makes real effort to distinguish Judas as the one who's going to betray Jesus from those who are truly His followers, those who are clean.

We see that at the end of verse 10, and you are clean, though not every one of you, for He knew who was going to betray Him. And that's why He said, not one of you, not everyone was clean.

And then in verse 18, I am not referring to all of you. I know those who I've chosen, but this is to fulfill the passage of Scripture. He who shared my bread has turned against me.

I am telling you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am. Jesus wants us to know that His death is no accident.

Judas' betrayal is no accident. No, in fact, Jesus is the great I am. A name God uses for Himself.

The God of the Old Testament, the God who made the universe, the God who promised throughout history to save His people.

[15:43] Jesus wants us to know that His death on the cross is part of God's plan to save us.

Jesus is completely in control. So Jesus is God's King, yet He became a servant for those He loves.

Christ. So, how should we respond to that this morning? Well, I think firstly, we should be astonished at the cross.

Astonished at the cross. When Jesus washed His disciples' feet, Peter was rightly shocked and astonished by what Jesus was doing in verse, We see that in verse 6.

Lord, are you going to wash my feet? How can the king who also made the heavens and the earth stoop so low as to wash the stinky, sticky feet of his own servants?

It's a shocking act like the king or prime minister coming to clean our household toilets. Yet how much more shocking that the same king would also willingly die on a cross for those he loves.

[16:54] Can I ask you this morning, are you astonished by that? Are you astonished by the cross? Are you astonished by how radical God's love is for you and me?

The God who made the heavens and the earth with complete sovereign authority would willingly die for you and me. So that we can share in his everlasting life and glory.

This is the astonishing love of God displayed in Jesus. It's this astonishing love that we will remember when we take the Lord's Supper later.

The bread to remember Jesus' body horrifically broken and beaten for us. The wine to remember Jesus' blood poured out for us at the cross so that we can be forgiven.

As we take the Lord's Supper later, why not take a moment to reflect on the shock of the cross and the astonishing love of God?

[17 : 59] But this astonishment should lead to more than just an emotional response. Because if we have grasped this astonishing love, then we also need to accept his service.

Take a look down at verse 8 with me. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. See, after Jesus has explained the foot washing as a picture, Peter still doesn't quite get it.

I can't accept this, Jesus, he says. This is too humiliating for you. You can't do this. I should be the one who is serving you. Now, we might think this is a noble attitude.

But how does Jesus respond? Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. You see, what Peter needed to understand and what we need to understand is if we want to share in Jesus' glory, have eternal life.

We need to humble ourselves. We need to accept him as the king who came to serve us. Being a follower of Jesus is not about how much we give him.

[19 : 15] It's about what he gives us. We need to accept him as the king who came to serve us. Jesus didn't come to make us rich or successful now.

He's not just some great moral example for us to follow. We need to accept him as the king who came to serve us. We need to accept that we can't make ourselves clean by simply living a good, respectable life.

Avoiding picking up more dirt doesn't clean us from the dirt we've already got. We need to accept that foundationally the very reason Jesus came is to die on a cross so that the dirt we have accumulated in our lives can be washed away.

He must uniquely die in our place. Can I ask this morning, have you accepted this? Jesus is God's king yet he became a servant for those he loves.

Have you accepted that the reason Jesus came was not to be a moral example but to die for your sin? Do you realise first and foremost your need for Jesus to die for you and cleanse you?

[20 : 36] Now Peter didn't fully understand what Jesus meant at the time. But he clearly saw Jesus' astonishing love and realised he did need to humbly accept what Jesus was doing to serve him.

So he says in verse 9, Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, Not just my feet, but my hands and head as well. He says, wash all of me.

Is this your response when you see the dirt in your life? To bring it to Jesus. To say, wash all of me. To say in the song that we'll sing in a moment, Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Now if this is you, there's real encouragement. See how Jesus responds to Peter in verse 10. Jesus answered, Those who have had a bath need only wash their feet.

Their whole body is clean. And you are clean. Now what Jesus says can at first seem a little bit confusing. But I think the point is this.

[21 : 42] It's not the physical washing of the feet that makes Peter clean. But what Jesus is about to do at the cross, The very thing the foot washing is symbolic of.

And Jesus says to Peter, If you have accepted me as God's king who came to serve you, You are clean. You are clean.

Now there might be some of us here this morning who really need to hear that. Perhaps burdened by the guilt of a broken past, painful regrets. Perhaps just weighed down by seeing your failure to live up to God's standards in your life.

Well no this morning. If you have truly accepted Jesus into your life as the king who came to serve you, You are clean. It doesn't mean we will live a perfect life without sin.

But if you really have accepted this, And seen Jesus' astonishing love, It will change your life. And I think we can only really live that changed life if we grasp this truth.

[22 : 53] The radical life Jesus calls us to follow us to in the next verses, Only makes sense when we grasp this amazing love. And it's very easy to forget this in the midst of life.

I think that's why foot washing is used as an example by Jesus. Peter would have washed his feet every day. What an amazing daily reminder he would have every time he washed his feet Of the astonishing love Jesus showed for him.

And so for us, we need to be reminded daily of this astonishing love. To know this assurance that if we believe and trust in him, we are truly clean.

Is this something you are taking time to do? I know personally the temptation of followers of Jesus to get busy serving, doing things. But if we are to serve, we must first let him serve us.

Let him serve us personally, like washing your feet. Take time each day in God's word To know more personally the astonishing love of Jesus that he has shown for you.

[24 : 08] But it doesn't finish there. Because if we have truly accepted Jesus' service first, then it will lead to transformation. Not only are Jesus' followers called to accept Jesus' service, but we're also called to follow his example.

Take a look down with me at verse 12. 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. That is, Jesus is saying, you're right to say I am your king.

That is correct, that is good. So, verse 14. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. See, now that we are clean, now you know that you are clean, you also must do the same.

Verse 15. 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.

[25 : 20] You see, if Jesus says, even if I, the king, with all authority, became a servant, a slave for you, how much more should you as my servants be willing to humble yourselves and serve each other?

Notice this command is directed at Jesus' followers. Because you should, verse 14 says, you should wash one another's feet. Jesus is addressing his disciples.

And the point is this, just as Jesus' service displays his love, as we serve each other, we display Jesus' love too.

It's the kind of humble service that Jesus says later will display his love to the world and let the world know that we are his disciples. Because it shows that we've really accepted this and grasped the astonishing love of Jesus.

And that we're following in the footsteps of the servant king. It's the kind of life that thinks less about ourselves, but more about how we can serve each other. Rather than thinking about how our time, intellect and finances, physical strength have been used for us.

[26 : 40] Rather, how can these things God has given me be used for serving others within the church, both locally and globally? It's a costly life.

Serving the needs in the church may mean we have less free time, less money, less comfort, less successful careers. It means sometimes, even when we can do things, perhaps we shouldn't do them for the sake of preventing others from stumbling.

Perhaps serving might mean devoting more time to praying for one another when you could be doing other things. Following Jesus' footsteps means accepting that no task is below us as Christians.

We should be willing to do anything that's required to help serve and build up others in the church. We should be willing to associate, perhaps, with those others in society we look down upon and show hospitality to those we might not naturally find it easy to show hospitality to and to do so without expecting anything in return.

And perhaps if you're not sure how you could get involved in serving with the needs of the church, why not chat to Chris afterwards? I'm sure he's got many suggestions of ways you could get involved with serving, practically.

[28 : 03] This pattern of life is not easy, but as we close, take a look at verse 17 with me. Now you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them.

Notice it's not a resentful service. It's a pattern of life that should bring joy. How does this pattern of laying our lives down to serve others in the church bring joy?

Well, I think, of course, there is that reality of as we do that, we know we are following the footsteps of Jesus and he's in glory now, and one day we will be in glory. That can give us assurance, that can give us joy.

But I also think there's a few different ways that it can bring us joy. You see, if we truly love Jesus, we will want to please him.

Just like, for example, I don't like doing the dishes, but because I love Naomi, my wife, I love to do the dishes because it serves her.

[29 : 13] It brings her joy and therefore it brings me joy. Sometimes serving in the Christian life can be a bit like that. Maybe there's things you don't necessarily feel naturally like you want to do, but actually because you love Jesus and you want to please him and you know it brings him joy, that in itself is enough to bring you joy too.

And it's the same as we do that for others in the church. Just think about the blessing it brings to other people in some of the things that you can do and seeing them lifted. As you see them lifted, the joy that that brings to you as well.

But I think also, as we humble ourselves and become like Jesus, we are, in a sense, preaching the gospel to ourselves in that moment.

every time you are forced to go low, to serve, willingly, be reminded of Jesus' astonishing love for you.

But I think it also brings us joy and blessing because when we serve like Jesus served, it's part of the means God uses to bring this blessing to others because we embody that astonishing love of Jesus.

[30 : 36] I think this is kind of why, this is why Jesus says in verse 20, very truly I tell you, everyone, whoever accepts anyone I send, accepts me, and whoever accepts me, accepts the one who sent me.

You see, Jesus is not just telling them how to keep going here, he's telling his disciples and us how to take the gospel out to the world. This is how you do it, by following my example.

When we act like this, when we serve as Jesus served, the world gets a glimpse of the astonishing love of God in Christ.

And that should give us great joy that God is using us to be a part of that amazing work. So why should we follow Jesus?

Because he's God's king who came to serve those he loves by the astonishing love of the cross to make us clean so that we can share in his glory.

[31 : 43] And as we follow, find true and deep joy and purpose. And what kind of life are we called to as followers of Jesus?

A life that lives in astonishment at the cross, accepts Jesus' astonishing service of us. A life that knows and is assured that you are clean.

and in response, joyfully, follows his example. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we just praise you for the astonishing love of Jesus that we see at the cross.

Thank you that though Jesus had all authority, he came to die on a cross to be publicly humiliated for those who would accept him.

Lord, help us to grasp this astonishing love for ourselves. Help us to be changed by this. Help us to daily be reminded of this.

[33 : 02] Help us to accept this truth. to accept his service. And Lord, would you see us the blessing, the joy, now that we know these things. Blessed are you if you do them.

Lord, would we know the joy that comes from following in his example. And may we put it into practice for the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name we ask.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.