

Keynote: Love and Service

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- [0 : 0 0] What happens when God shows up in the messiness and ugliness of our lives? What happens when the Lord, the sovereign Lord of the universe, shows up in the most shameful and sinful areas of our lives?
- Those areas that we'd much rather keep secret. You see, those two questions are really daunting for us to think about. I think what you'll discover as we get into John chapter 13 is that this is incredibly liberating to answer these questions.
- What happens when God shows up in the messiness and ugliness of our lives? John chapter 13, he washes feet. And what happens when we see the Lord washing our feet is it transforms the way that we view the world.
- And there are two ways in which our passage highlights this transformation. It says that it transforms first the way that we understand Jesus' lordship in our lives. And second, it transforms the way we understand what it means to be his disciples, to follow the Lord.
- So those are the two things we're going to be looking at. Jesus' lordship and our discipleship and how this passage transforms it. Lordship. Lordship. I want to paint a bit of the context before we look at it straight.
- [1 : 3 0] John chapter 13 slows down the pace of the gospel story. You'll know maybe that in John chapters 2 through 12 has looked at some three years of Jesus' life.
- But now in John chapters 13 through 19, we look at 24 hours of Jesus' life. The pace has slowed down and Jesus has slipped away from the public eye and he has withdrawn into the stillness of the night.
- In verse 1, we're told that it's the night before the feast of the Passover. Jesus knows that his hour has come. Tomorrow, he will be convicted and tortured and crucified.
- Tonight, he will be betrayed, denied, mocked. And so now in the calm before the storm, the savior of the world savors an intimate meal with his disciples.
- And we're told that suddenly in the midst of this intimate meal, in verse 4, Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments and taking a towel.
- [2 : 4 0] He tied it around his waist. And now dressed like a slave, verse 5, he pours water into a basin and begins to wash the feet of his disciples to wipe them with the towel that is around his waist.
- Verse 5. I figure it's one of the most intimate and shocking scenes in all the Bible. And it's meant to be for us a picture of the magnificent love of God that is going to be poured out into the world tomorrow when Jesus gives his life away on the cross.
- The Lord washes feet. And notice how John slows down and gives us every single detail. This is really rare in the Gospel of John.
- He is so descriptive here. He says, The Lord rose. He took off his garments. He put on. He poured water. He washed. He wiped. It's so vivid. It's so that we can almost visualize it.

So that we can feel like we're there as Jesus washes his disciples' feet. We get drawn into the moment. And as we're drawn into the moment, we start to feel the shock of what Jesus is doing.

[3 : 56] It's shocking simply at a human level. I don't know if you've ever had your feet washed before, but it can be a bit of an uncomfortable and vulnerable thing. I've had my feet washed once before.

It was about eight or nine years ago. I was on a five-day camping trip in kind of a desert island off the coast of Los Angeles in California. It was about 37 degrees every day.

We were hiking an average of 10 miles a day in dusty roads, and we had no body of water in which to bathe. So you can imagine how dirty my feet were.

And at the end of this trip, it was a work trip, my boss said, All right, I want to wash all my employees' feet. So he lined us up. He took off our shoes, peeled off our socks, and he got his hands in the dirtiness.

It's an uncomfortable and vulnerable thing to have somebody wash your feet. And just at a purely human level, it's utterly shocking. And in the ancient world, it would have been more shocking because feet were the dirtiest and ugliest and most shameful part of the human person.

[5 : 07] And the climate was much like California. It was dry and arid. There were dusty roads, and there were markets in the roads with animals and all the animal droppings and goodness. Humans normally wore sandals.

They were open-toed sandals, and you can imagine walking around how dirty feet got in that context. So in the ancient world, there was a huge social and cultural stigma around washing feet.

A superior was never allowed to wash the feet of somebody that was socially inferior to them and below them. It was the job of slaves and servants. So if somebody was invited to your house and you had a slave or a servant, you would have them wash your guests' feet.

But you would never wash their feet. Either a slave would do it, or you would give that person water for them to wash their own feet. And in all the ancient literature that we have, there's actually no example of somebody that is socially superior ever stooping down and washing the feet of people that are below him.

And yet, verses 4 and 5, Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, taking a towel, wraps it around himself, pours water into a basin, gets on his knees, and does literally what has never been done before.

[6 : 30] He washes the feet of those that are below him. At a purely human level, it's unthinkable and it's unimaginable. Yet John doesn't want us to think just on the human level.

He wants us to think on the divine level. And he wants us to see that Jesus is fully aware of who he is as he does this. Look at verse 3. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, knowing that he is the sovereign Lord of the universe with all power and all authority over all times and all places and all people.

And then look, he knows also that he had come from God and that he was going back to God. He knows that he shares in the identity of God and he radiates God's majesty and glory as the eternal Son of the Father.

Jesus knows who he is as he gets down on his knees and he washes dirty feet. And Jesus washes feet, not despite being the Lord, but because he is the Lord.

It's not a contradiction of his Lordship. It's a manifestation of it. There was a famous preacher in the 5th century who had a wonderful name.

[7 : 55] Severian of Gabala. Any of those of you that are pregnant, think about that one. He was a preacher in the city of Constantinople and he described more beautifully than anyone what's going on here.

Listen to what he says. This was not a lowering of Jesus' dignity. Rather, it was a manifestation of his love for us. And listen to the contrast.

He who is clothed in light as in a robe was clad in a cloak. He who wraps the heavens with clouds wrapped himself with a towel.

He who pours water into the rivers and the oceans and the pools tipped some water into a basin. And he before whom every knee bends in heaven and on earth and under the earth knelt to wash the feet of his creatures.

Jesus is starting to transform our understanding of lordship. He's starting to show us that what is so unique about him being the lord, what marks him as separate from all the other false lords and all the other false gods is not simply that he is high and exalted, that he is majestic and that he has the name that is above every name, although that is true.

[9 : 20] What sets him apart from all the other false gods and lords is also that he is willing to bend the knee and do what no other false lord or god would be willing to do and wash those that are below him.

In John chapter 13, we are seeing what happens when the lord shows up in the messiness and the ugliness and the shamefulness of our lives. He washes. And it's a beautiful picture of the gospel, of the cross.

Jesus cleansing and purifying our sins. Jesus lovingly washing and scrubbing the most shameful and dirty parts of us.

Jesus humbly serving prideful human beings. And when this gospel, brothers and sisters, start to take root in our hearts and in our minds and starts to transform us, it completely reorients the way that we think about discipleship, about what it means to follow Jesus.

And so I want to look at two ways our understanding of discipleship is transformed. First thing, to honor Jesus as Lord means, first, you got to let him love you.

[10 : 40] Being a disciple of Jesus means, first, learning to receive. look at verses 6 and 8 with me. He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet?

Jesus answered him, what I'm doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand. I think he's pointing to the cross. Verse 8, Peter said to him, Lord, you shall never wash my feet.

You see what Peter does? Peter's appalled. Peter's horrified. Peter knows this is not the way the world works. So he resists it.

Foot washing's uncomfortable and unnatural, so he resists it. And we do the exact same thing. But just like Peter. With my ecclesiastics this past week on Wednesday, I asked them, I like asking them would you rather questions.

They're kind of fun. And I asked them, would you rather have somebody wash your feet or would you rather wash somebody else's feet? What would it be? Let them think about it and watch them squirm in their chairs for a little bit.

[11 : 54] And then I asked for a show of hands. I said, how many of you would rather have your feet washed? And interestingly, only about a third of them raised their hands. And I said, who would rather be the one to wash somebody else's feet and the other two-thirds raise their hands?

Only two-thirds of them would rather wash somebody's feet than have their own feet washed because it's uncomfortable, it's unnatural, and we resist it. And this resistance, this moral and spiritual resistance to Jesus shows up in a whole lot of different ways in our lives.

There are many reasons for it. One is, like Peter, we can simply think that it's below Jesus' pay grade. It's below his dignity. I think that's how Peter feels.

It's like he's saying, no, Lord, this is too shameful for you. This isn't your job. I can wash my own feet or I should be washing your feet, but you mine? Definitely not.

Peter thinks it's below Jesus' pay grade and his dignity. Another reason is we could simply not like admitting that we need cleansing, that we're dirty.

[13 : 02] we're uncomfortable with the reality that we're dirty and that there are shameful and secret parts of our lives and that we need to be cleansed and that we can't do anything about it.

We don't like admitting our need. Another reason is that we fear rejection. You see, to have somebody wash your feet, to let somebody into the most vulnerable parts of your life is risky.

The greatest human desire, some people have said, is to know and be known, to love and be loved, and the greatest human fear is to be known and not loved.

We fear rejection. And what Jesus says to Peter and what Jesus says to us in our discomfort and in our resistance is he gives us a stern but loving word.

Look at verse 8, the latter half of verse 8. Jesus answered Peter, if I do not wash your feet, you have no share with me. It's a stern but loving word.

[14 : 09] Jesus is saying, Peter, if you don't let me wash you, you can't have anything to do with me. You have to let me wash you. Jesus is saying to me, Jordan, you've got to let me enter into the dirtiest and darkest parts of your lives or you can't be my disciple.

Jesus is saying to you, you have to let me deal with the sin and the shame and the secret stuff. You've got to let me bend down and scrub and cleanse and wash and rinse and love you in this particular way.

we cannot be proud before the humble Lord. So first, to honor Jesus as Lord means simply letting him love you in the most unlovely places of you.

Being a disciple means learning to receive. But there's a second part of being a disciple. It's learning to love one another. to honor Jesus as Lord means loving one another too.

It means receiving then it means giving. We see this in verses 12 to 15. Go there with me. Jesus resumes his place at the head of the table and he says to his disciples, do you understand what I've done to you?

[15 : 31] You call me teacher and Lord and you are right for so I am. If I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you should also do just as I have done to you. Now this is really, really interesting.

Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not ask us to wash his feet in return for him washing our feet. And wouldn't that be the most natural thing to do in this place?

I, your superior, washed you, my inferior. I washed your feet, now you wash my feet. I gave to you, now you give to me. I served and loved you, now you serve and love me.

And here, Jesus does not want us to wash his feet. That's not what he says. Rather, he wants us to wash each other's feet. And the person I think who's captured this best was a British missionary in India named Leslie Newbigin.

[16 : 38] Listen to what he says. He says, Jesus has laid aside his life for us all. And the debt which we owe to him is to be discharged by our subjection to our neighbor in loving service.

Now if that was confusing, listen to this next line. Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe to the master.

Our neighbor is the appointed agent authorized to receive what we owe to the master. So what is Jesus saying to us? He's saying that we're meant to give to our neighbor what we owe to him, the master, and we first receive from him.

This is radically transformative the way we relate to one another. It means that when I come home from work and I engage with my spouse and my children, I'm meant to give to them what I owe to the master.

It means that when I engage with my parents and my siblings, I'm meant to give to them what I owe to the master. It means when I engage with my coworkers and my friends, when I engage with you, when I serve the ecclesiastics, I am meant to give what I owe to the master.

[17 : 54] And this is so central to discipleship according to Jesus that later on in our passage, he gives, goes on to give a new commandment.

Look at verse 34 with me. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

And by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. It's a new commandment.

Not because God's never said love each other before, but because in light of what Jesus has just done and is about to do, the quality of love and the costliness and the extravagance of the love that we're being called to is radically new.

And this is a love that is messy and it's complicated and it's costly. We know it is when we get involved in each other's lives. This is not airy-fairy sentimentalism.

[19 : 03] This is not heroic one-time acts of service. But this is a way of life that takes shape in the nitty-gritty, in the ordinary mundane, in the day-after-day as we give to each other what we owe to the Master.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, says Jesus, if you have love for one another. Why? Because we're never more like our Lord or like God than when we wash each other's feet.

Now, if you're anything like me, there may be a series of questions arising in your heart and I want to end just here by dealing with a few. For some of us, when we hear this command, we may wonder, why does this sort of love not come naturally to me?

We may wonder, how do I learn to live like this? Or what should I do if my heart is so cold and resistant to actually caring for my brothers and sisters?

I look on them with contempt more than compassion. And I think the key of our passage, the key of our passage, is realizing that we can't give what we haven't first received.

[20 : 21] And we can't give what we don't continue to receive from the Lord Jesus. See, the second aspect of discipleship, love one another, is always contingent and dependent upon the first aspect of discipleship, which is, let Jesus stoop down and love you.

Brothers and sisters, when we are faced with the hardness of our hearts and our resistance to loving one another, we have to come back to the place where we let Jesus get down and we let him love us.

We just receive. We let him do the work that only he can do. And from there, his love for us empowers his love towards one another.

So, brothers and sisters, my final word to you this morning, I think Jesus wants to say, let me wash you and let me do it over and over and over again.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.