

Power to Serve

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. It's good to see you. Well, today's passage is from the night before Jesus went to the cross. He's about to send his disciples out into the world in a new way.

So he's training and preparing them. From John 13, starting right here, all the way to John 17, we have the longest body of Christ's teaching in the Bible. And it's all there as a training course to get the disciple ready to be sent out.

It starts with this remarkable act of Jesus washing feet. It's clearly a symbolic act. In verse 3, it says, Jesus knew. This means in his head, he was thinking about who he was and what he came to do. That he had come from the Father. He had come to earth. He was going back to the Father. He was going to rule and reign. And then it says in verse 4, In other words, he's thinking about heavy, high theology.

And therefore, he gets up and does the foot washing. So the foot washing is a sign. It's a symbol. It's a picture for us. As we think about the meaning of the foot washing, we're going to learn about Jesus' person, who he is, his power, what drives him, and the pattern of his life that he gives us.

[1:28] Person, power, and pattern. So first of all, let's think about the foot washing and what it tells us about Jesus the person. What Jesus does here is socially not just jarring, but offensive.

At least to the people who are there. Because we're talking about a climate which is hot and arid, and people wore sandals. When they arrived at a lovely meal, of course, they had very dirty, dusty, smelly feet.

And you lay on your side, and you reclined at tables, so feet were in close proximity to your nostrils. It was only fair for everyone that feet were washed before the meal.

Who washed the feet? Slaves. But not even high-ranking slaves. There are all sorts of ranks of slaves, but a higher-ranking slave wouldn't even do this.

And definitely not the host of a meal. Certainly not a guest of honour or a rabbi, a teacher, a person who had status in society, would never do such an unthinkable thing.

[2:31] Only the lowest of the low. Incredibly menial tasks, considered extremely offensive, but Jesus is deliberately doing it.

Here there's this shocking juxtaposition of his social status with his behaviour. But don't forget, this is a sign of who he really is. We will never understand Jesus unless we understand him as a conundrum, a mystery.

The conundrum of his high status, but his humble behaviour. Because this just isn't any teacher. Jesus made high claims about himself, higher than anybody has ever made.

Buddha, Mohammed, repeatedly and clearly denied they were not God. But Jesus repeatedly and clearly claimed to be God, the creator of the universe.

Sometimes he did it directly. In John 8, Jesus said, before Abraham was, I am. We know I am was the name that God gave Moses at the burning bush.

[3:37] I am who I am. Jesus takes that name on himself. In John 8, Jesus says, to know me is to know God. In John 14, he says, to see me is to see God.

In Mark 9, he says, to receive me is to receive God. John 14, he says, no one comes to God except through me. Now, these are astonishing claims.

In fact, when Jesus says he's the son of God, ancient listeners knew what he meant, claiming equality with God. And that was considered blasphemous, which is what the charge they finally got him on when it came to the crucifixion.

So directly, he's constantly saying, I'm God. I'm equal with God the Father. But indirectly, he does it all the time too. Almost every page of the Gospels.

Mark 2, he claims he has the power to forgive sins. John 6, the right and power to give eternal life. Mark 14, the right and power to judge everyone in the earth.

[4:46] Every time someone decides to bow down or worship Jesus, he doesn't stop them. Look at Thomas when he finally realizes he says, my Lord and my God, and then he bows down. Jesus doesn't say, get up, get up.

Let's him stay there. Jesus isn't just a rabbi or a teacher. The claims of Jesus are as high and as lofty as anything anyone's ever said about themselves.

And on the other hand, the foot washing caps a whole life of behavior that is the exact opposite of the claim. Are you hearing the conundrum? The foot washing caps a whole life of behavior that completely contradicts the claim of divinity because it's so low, so humble and sensitive.

What do I mean? Well, we know Jesus ate with people. And in those times, eating meant you were having intimate friendship and relationship with whosoever you ate with.

And Jesus ate with people that society saw as outcast. People that were rejected by society.

People who were shamed by society. So Jesus ate with tax collectors.

[5:55] And that got the liberals really mad because tax collectors were siding with the Romans and they had lots of money because they were greedy. And so if you're a social justice liberal Jew at the time, Jesus should not have done anything with the tax collectors.

On the other hand, Jesus ate with prostitutes. And that got the traditionalists and the conservatives upset. He actually touched lepers. And nobody touched lepers.

Everyone was afraid of contamination. In fact, Jesus actually also ate with Pharisees. And we live in an era now that says you should be tolerant of everybody except intolerant people.

But Jesus was tolerant of intolerant people. Which means he's actually more open-minded than anyone today. So there's a humility here. His willingness to associate with people.

He went to the margins. He went to the poor, the oppressed, the shame, the rejected, and he hung out with them. But it wasn't just his humble behaviour, but also his sensitive behaviour.

[7:00] His care. His insight. His wisdom. In John 3 and 4, Jesus meets people who don't know who he is. And he's blunt and hard with Nicodemus in John 3.

But he's kind and careful with the woman at the well in John 4. Then we go on to John 11. And here's Mary and Martha. And their brother Lazarus has died.

And they're grieving at the tomb. And Jesus is a bit tough and hard on Martha. But he's kind and careful with Mary. He's tough with some people and soft with others.

Why? Because Jesus is not driven by habit or by temper, but by who he is. He's infinitely sensitive. He knows where people are at.

Gives them exactly what they need. He meets them where they're at. There's divine insight. There's listening. And the ability to enter into what the person actually needs.

[8:00] We see a jarring note. Sorry, we never see a jarring note. And we never see a wrong step. Here's the conundrum. Infinite highness and infinite lowness.

Lowliness. Unbelievably high claims. Radically contradicted by the most gentle and humble and kind servant heart. In Jesus Christ, we see tenderness without weakness.

Boldness without harshness. Humility yet confident without any uncertainty. Unbending conviction. Insistence on truth, but always bathed in love.

There's this juxtaposition of high status, the high claims with the lowly behaviour, the humility, the sensitivity. When we put this together, Jesus can't just be a nice guy.

He can't just be a religious quack. This pushes us to what John saw in Jesus. The rational conclusion is he actually is the son of God.

[9:07] The emotional conclusion is beautiful. So that's the picture of this person, Jesus. Secondly, this gives us not just a picture of this person, but a picture of his power.

What drives him was his motivation from verse 1. Look at the sentence. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Having begun with love, Jesus loves them to the end. The thing that drives Jesus Christ was unconditional, unending love. And we can talk about unconditional love, and it's just words.

What's great about this story, this symbol, this picture is pointing to how strong Jesus' love really is. Jesus is washing their feet in the face of cultural forces that would stop other people from loving this way.

It shows us that Jesus' love is essentially infallible. His love is unstoppable. No matter what you throw at him, Jesus can bear it. Just think, Jesus is loving them, thinking about their needs, and serving them in spite of his impending death the very next day.

[10:27] It's not that hard to comfort people when you're feeling comfortable, but when you've got a lot on your mind, and when you're in pain, it's very hard to think about anybody else.

Here is Jesus. We can't fathom how much pain he's in and about to experience. We see a short time later, he's praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He knows he's about to take on his shoulders the sins of the world. He knows the agony he's about to go through, but he thinks of others.

This is the Creator, the God of the universe, encapsulated in the person of Jesus. Matthew 20, verse 28, Mark 10, 45, John 13, all say, the Son of Man came not just to, sorry, the Son of Man came not to serve, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus serves all the way to laying down his life. When problems are happening to us, when we're upset, when we're hurting, when something's going wrong, we self-pity.

[11:37] It's rare to even notice anybody else's needs. But Jesus, no matter the pain, loves us without a molecule of self-pity.

And maybe even more importantly, Jesus loves us even though we're so unworthy. Glad we did that. Stan, let's share Philippians 2. We notice parallels to Philippians 2 here, where it says, he rose from his throne, he emptied himself of his glory, he became a servant.

That's exactly what Jesus does here. He rises from his meal, he takes off his outer garment, he grabs a towel and a basin, and he stoops down low and washes his disciples' feet.

And doing all this, John 13 verse 2 points out, Judas was going to betray him. And we know Peter later denies even knowing Jesus, and the rest run off into the night.

And yet here is Jesus washing all their feet. There's no indication that when he got to Judas, he said, now I know what you're about to do. You're not worthy.

[12:44] They're all actually going to hurt Jesus terribly, but he washes every single one of their feet. He serves them without exception. He washes the feet of the person who doesn't believe in him as well as the person who does.

It's hard to love when you're hurting. It's really hard to love when you're getting nothing out of the relationship. Nowadays, we tend to love in an economic transactional term.

To some degree. It has to be mutually beneficial. What can we both get out of this? Whether it's romantic relationship, marriage, friendship, coming to church. I'll do this until my needs aren't being met.

Then I'm out of here. That's not the way with Jesus. The cost-benefit thing is not there. Once Jesus puts his love on you, nothing can dislodge it.

Not a million failures, nothing can dislodge it. He loves you. This is unconditional. Having loved, he loved them to the end.

[13:49] Jesus says, I don't love you because of X, Y, Z. I love you just because I love you. And that's where unconditional love comes from. Because if you say, I love you because of X, Y, and Z, that means you did something and now I'll do something.

It's transactional. It doesn't say, having given themselves to Jesus, he loved them to the end. It says, having loved them, he loved them.

The reason he loves to the end is because he loved at the beginning. In fact, the whole relationship happens because Jesus puts his love on us. And it's not because we're worthy.

He doesn't love us because we're perfect. He loves us because he is perfect. He doesn't love us because we're great. He loves us because he's great.

His love is not a function of our holiness. It's a function of his holiness. When Jesus deliberately washes the feet of these people who are about to hurt him terribly, he is getting nothing out of the relationship.

[15:01] Jesus says, come, be my disciples. Once we enter into this love relationship, Jesus says, I will never forsake you. There is nothing that be thrown at my love that will ever dislodge it.

I was forsaken on the cross, paid the penalty for your sin, so that now I will never ever forsake you. So what drives Jesus? It's this power of unconditional electing love.

And that leads us to the third point, pattern. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is that there's only one God in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Who have known each other and loved each other throughout all eternity. And to love someone is to glorify them. It's to lift them up, to give yourself to them. From all eternity, the Trinity has been doing just that.

Many people think that when Jesus came, gave up his glory and came down, it was to serve us and serve our needs. And that he's only doing this for us.

[16:04] But it's actually what he's been doing for all eternity. That's the very essence of the greatness of God. That he gave up his greatness, to become something lesser out of love.

What is more glorious than losing your glory? This is what C.S. Lewis has to say. In self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm of all creation and of all being.

For the eternal word gives himself in mortal sacrifice, and that not only on Calvary. For when he was crucified on Calvary, he did that in the wild weather of his outlying provinces, what he had done at home in glory and gladness.

From before the foundation of the world, Christ surrenders begotten deity back to begetting deity in obedience. As the Son glorifies the Father, so also the Father glorifies the Son.

So from the highest to the lowest, we see this pattern, this system of self-giving. And this is a law we can't escape. The only thing outside this system of self-giving is self-absorption.

[17:17] The Trinity is the ultimate reality. Jesus loved, and therefore loves to the end, because that is who he is. We either embrace self-giving, or we embrace self-absorption.

We see this pattern, I have washed your feet, now I want you to wash other feet. Just a little bit of an aside, culture that's not something we do anymore.

This is about service. Let me say a few things quickly about how what Jesus did means for the way in which we actually live. Number one, it means we should be respectful, and loving, and kind, and courteous to people who oppose us.

We live in a time in which everybody is talking about polarisation and tribalism. We don't have conversations anymore. We just flame people, or cancel them. There's no tolerance for people who don't agree with us.

Jesus not only washes the feet of intolerant people, but of somebody trying to kill him. This means we need to take the lead in being respectful, and patient, and humble with people who oppose us.

[18:26] Second thing, part of the nature of this upside-down pattern is that Jesus gives us a different model of greatness. We can't really understand John 13 unless we read it with Luke 22.

Luke 22 tells us that in the upper room there was a dispute between the apostles. They were arguing about who's going to be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus stops the debate and says, who is greater, the one who sits at the table and is waited on, or the one who serves?

And he says, I'm among you as one who serves. Jesus is deliberately saying, greatness and power is found in the people who serve. Luke 22 tells us, it doesn't tell us about the foot washing, and John 13 doesn't tell us about the argument.

But when we put them together, we realise they're both happening together. Here we are, immersed in the world's understanding of greatness and Jesus contradicts it.

Jesus ascends the heights by descending to the depths. He saves the world by becoming weak, by serving, by losing power, by being beaten up and killed and tortured.

[19:39] So the Christian understanding of greatness, the way up is down. The way of influence and power is to serve.

And the way to find happiness is not to care about your own happiness, but to seek the happiness of others. But the world will tell you exactly the opposite.

If we give, we naturally expect to get something in return. But once we understand what Jesus did for us, it blows the cost-benefit thing completely out of the water.

look at what's in the basin when Jesus washes their feet. He's serving them. Verses 10 and 11, he says, I am making you clean. So the water is symbolic for salvation.

In Luke 12, 37, he says that on the last day, he's going to dress himself to serve and wait on us. Now, this is a metaphor. He says, I'm going to show you my glory.

[20:38] I'm going to give you fullness of life. I'm going to give you a glorified body. Jesus is saying, in serving you, I will finally fill your heart. The beauty you've been looking for in creation, the wealth you've been looking for, you actually find it in the creator when you finally see the glory of Jesus.

He gives us everything we need. So let's look at the cost-benefit. If you're a Christian, we should never look at somebody else and say, you're not being thankful to me. You're not being nice to me. I'm going to pull back. When we look at the world, we need to say, you owe me nothing. I am everyone's debtor because I am eternally rich beyond all earthly dreams. Verse 12, Jesus asks, do you understand what I've done for you? Do we? Peter didn't. He said, I'll wash my hands and head as well. But Jesus goes on to say, I've set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

[21 : 53] Very truly, I tell you, 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'll be blessed if you do them.

Look at what Jesus is giving us now and for the rest of eternity. He's serving. He's mine. He's my friend. He's my shepherd.

He's my king. He's going to meet all my needs where I'm at according to his riches of glory. So why in the world would I not just serve? I'm rich.

Why would I ever pull back? We need to look at the world and say, I can kneel and serve you and never get up because the ultimate power of the universe knelt all the way down to laying down his life all the way to hell to serve me.

If you know this love, you'll be able to serve other people. We all need this love. No friend love, no spouse of love, no love from parents or love from children will ever fill the deepest recesses of our heart.

[23 : 04] We can't live without Jesus' love. So get it by faith and then live and have the power to serve as loved as you are. Amen.