

The Love which Stoops to Serve

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together back now to John 13, John chapter 13, and we're going to look at verses 1 to 11 effectively, 1 to 9 especially of this chapter, looking again at this incident in the life of Simon Peter that we've been following through for some time now, and we've come to Peter at this stage in the upper room where Jesus proceeds to wash the feet of the disciples, and we come to this very interesting and important interaction between himself and the Lord.

This is really, in a sense, like one of those great paintings from one of the master painters, especially of the older type of masterpieces, and where you find that the main feature of the painting is something that your eye is drawn to wherever else you actually look at any of the details in the painting.

This passage is a bit like that, where it gives us the main subject of Jesus himself, although we're looking at Simon Peter's life, of course, we've said before that that really draws us to consider Christ himself as the prominent feature of all of these passages, even above that of Peter himself. And just as you look at all the different aspects of what Peter is in the passage, and the other issues that are also of detail packed into the passage, your eye is constantly drawn to Jesus.

Your eye is constantly drawn towards him and towards what he is and what he says and how he deals with Peter. And the title of our study this evening really focuses on that itself, on Christ himself in the way that he deals with Peter, because we're calling it the love which stoops to serve.

[1 : 58] The love which stoops to serve. The love of Christ, that is, which stoops to serve his people, and which proves to be a pattern or an example for us in our love, in order that we too will stoop and not be reluctant to stoop, to serve others in Jesus' name.

And so the chapter begins, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And then it proceeds to tell us what happened leading to this interaction with Peter and the important details that are set out there for us.

Well, there are three things in regard to Christ's action. There's action and love that are important for us to take note of and apply to our own lives this evening.

Whatever our relationship with God is, there's plenty here for us to take with us, to apply to ourselves even now as we look at this passage. We'll look at, first of all, Christ's action in relation to who he was.

Well, who he is, really, is more accurate perhaps. And who he was on that occasion, is especially what we're referring to. His action was action taken in relation to who he was.

[3 : 18] Secondly, it's an action that is taken in relation to what he knew. What he knew about himself especially and his position and what he was doing there at that exact moment.

And thirdly, we'll look at Christ's action, the love that stoops to serve, Christ's action in relation to how we must live if we are to be disciples of Jesus.

The love that stoops to serve in relation to who he was, in relation to what he knew, in relation to how we must live.

So you notice what he's saying here, having loved them, he loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end, he loved them to the extremity, if you like, to the furthest possible reaches of love.

But then during supper, when the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot Simon's son to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and was going back to God, he rose from supper.

[4 : 25] And he laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, he tied it round his waist. And then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash his disciples' feet.

Now there's a whole lot of very important theology packed into these verses, these words. Because the laying aside of his outer garments, and then the taking them again after washing the disciples' feet, is itself illustrative for us of what it meant spiritually for the Son of God to come into this world, and how he had come into this world, and why he had come into this world, and indeed how he was going to leave this world and go back to the Father.

That's really what he's saying at the beginning there, knowing that his heart had come to depart out of the world, out of this world to go to the Father. And he knew that he had come from God, verse 3, and was going back to God.

And verse 12, when he had washed their feet, and put on his outer garments, he resumed his place. And all of that is really illustrative. This laying aside his outer garments, taking a towel, which really is the garment of a slave.

That's who normally washed the feet of guests that came into a house at the invitation of the host. The host did not normally do that.

[5 : 50] That would be most unusual. There were slaves in the house to do that. And here is Jesus taking the form of a servant, the form of a slave indeed, a bond servant, and even girding himself, tying this round his waist, as a servant would do.

And then when he was finished washing the disciples' feet, he put his garments back on again. The theology is the theology of incarnation.

The theology of Christ's humiliation as the Son of God, having left his position in heaven, though not leaving his godhood behind, and not leaving his sonship behind.

He left that environment of heaven. He left that condition of heaven that he had always had from all eternity, and he entered into the conditions of this world.

He laid aside, if you like, the outer garments of his royalty in heaven, and he put on the garments with our nature, giving him the facility to serve, and to serve even to the point of death.

[6 : 57] He tied this around his own person. He became the servant who is now seen as washing the disciples' feet, ministering to his people.

And remember that this is God. Remember tonight who it is you're looking at in this passage that leads us to consider what he did and said with Peter.

Who is this that actually laid aside his outer garments, literally, his outer clothes, and put on this towel to wash the disciples' feet?

This is God. Amazing though it is, and it sounds so amazing, you almost hesitate to say it, but it is God. If you believe tonight that Jesus is God, as we are indeed of the view that that's what the Bible teaches us, therefore we accept that Jesus is God, was always God, and didn't cease to be God when he came into this world, and as we believe that tonight, well, there is God on his knees.

There is God with a towel around his waist in the person of his Son incarnate. There is God bending down to wash the feet of disciples. There is God in the action of servanthood, in the action of humility, and humble service.

[8 : 18] There is God. He loved them in such a way that did not hesitate to take that position for their benefit.

Now to that, tonight that's saying a lot to me and to you about this Jesus, this Christ, more so than it is about Peter, because it tells us in order to, for us to be saved, this is what it took.

This is actually what God did. This is the action of God the Son, taking our nature, laying aside these garments of royalty, if we might put it that way, as we've said, and taking the form of a servant.

Philippians chapter 2 has a brilliant passage in that, of course, packed with the greatest theology, and yet so important for us to understand it at the level of realizing what is happening when Jesus is born, what is happening when the Son of God appears in the form of a servant.

It's God stooping down to us, isn't it? It's God showing His willingness to take the lowest place in the whole creation so that we might benefit from that.

[9 : 40] And here we are, sometimes reluctant to take the lowest place as the disciples did, as we'll see in a moment. Yet our greatest example of humble service is God, God in the person of His Son.

Christ laying aside His outer garments, engaging in this work of washing the feet of His disciples, emblematic of His work of redemption, leading to the cross and including the cross.

and then when it was finished, He put them on again. He had come from the Father, He was going back to the Father. That's what the passage is saying.

How difficult for you and for me tonight, even as a preacher of the gospel, how difficult really it is just to get into our minds that this actually is what God did.

and that His love for His people did not stop short of coming to take the lowest position possible in bearing our sin, in pouring out His soul unto death in His incarnate existence.

[10:57] And why? Well, so that you and I would have the best that God has to offer. He took our worst, He took our sins, He took our guilt, He took our condemnation, and in exchange we get the very best that God has to give, eternal life, Christ-likeness, an eternity of absolute joy and bliss.

without interruption. Christ's action in relation to who He was. Secondly, His action in relation to what He knew.

Now, He knew that the disciples at this point had been engaged in a squabble or a dispute as to who was the greatest. We rely on Luke particularly to give us an account of that dispute or squabble at this particular stage in Christ's ministry and in Peter's experience as well.

Luke chapter 22 and at verse 24. Here they are. It's relating to the day of the Passover, the unleavened bread, and this is then following on the institution of the Lord's Supper.

And then you come to verse 24 in Luke 22. A dispute also arose among them as to who which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And He said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them and those in authority over them are called benefactors, but not so with you.

[12:32] Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, the one who reclines at table or the one who serves?

Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. He came not to be served.

He came not, though He was the king and remained the king, to have service given to Him. He came to serve. He came to serve as the servant of the Father so that His people would be saved.

And you know, that's a definition of greatness. How does the world tonight define greatness? How does the world really define what it is to be a great person or a significant person?

Well, in all sorts of different ways and especially in an age of celebrity, you know where that goes. They have the greatest resources. They have the greatest name.

[13:38] They're known all over the place. It's not just celebrity, of course, but the world's definition of greatness is absolutely different and very opposite to Christ's definition of greatness because Christ's definition of greatness is the one who serves.

It's patterned on Himself. It's the one who is most like Him in serving God and in serving others, in being willing to take humble service to ourselves.

That's really what He's saying. the disputing disciples. He counters that by this particular incident as well as what He taught them there in Luke 22.

And He shows them the meaning of greatness. And He is the example of it as He washes the disciples' feet. And you know, that's also very important for us because here is the greatest theology.

Here is a theology, the Son of God, the eternal God, coming to take our nature, our human nature, coming to be a servant in that nature. That's great theology.

[14:47] It's important to know that. Know your theology. Don't be ashamed of that. But where does it get to? What's the point of it?

It's to make us servants. It's to make us servants of Jesus. And if our theology, however much our head may be packed with it, however much our heart may be moved by it, if our theology tonight has not made us servants of Jesus, then that theology has failed.

It doesn't matter where we stand, how many gifts we may have. That theology that the Bible sets before us is a theology, even the greatest, as he himself put it, even I am among you as one who serves.

What are we doing with our theology? Is it really filtering through into our practical life as it should? Are we content tonight to just have our heads packed with it, our knowledge of doctrine?

Great, oh, that is. Well, Jesus is saying, actually, that's ultimately a failure because it doesn't reach the practicalities of your life. And that theology here is really reaching into what he's setting before the disciples, that they also take the humblest, lowest service, if need be, as disciples of God.

[16:15] In relation to what he knew, he didn't just know about squabbling disciples, he also knew that there was a devilish design in all of this. There was something here to do with Satan in all of these circumstances, and the Lord knew that.

During supper, in verse 2, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus knowing, then he proceeded. It's not that he didn't know this.

And you might wonder there, well, surely if the Lord knew that, and knew the type of person Judas Iscariot was, and knew what Judas Iscariot was going to do, and wanted really to show his love for his disciples by washing their feet, would he not really have been better just saying to Judas, you don't belong here, Judas, you get out.

You're not a true disciple, and before I do this, I want you to leave. He didn't do that. He washed the feet of Judas, along with the rest.

Only later do you read that Judas went out in verse 30, and it was night significantly, symbolically. He went out into the darkness. He was a son of darkness. You see, Jesus is more or less saying, by leaving Judas there, it's really more or less saying, as it were, to Judas.

[17:40] Judas, if you're going to betray me, you're going to betray me against the fact that I washed your feet. You're going to betray me against the fact that you've seen the greatest love in action.

That you've seen my service reaching that point where I stooped down and I washed your feet, and I showed my affection even in that. And so it is for you and for me as well.

if we're going to deny the Lord, if we're not going to accept the Lord, then God is saying to us and Jesus is saying to us tonight, you'll have to do it in the face of my love.

You'll have to do it in the face of my serving of my people. Because I'm not going to let you away with thinking that it's a slight thing not to accept me or to reject me or to continue without me.

He knew the devilish design in the case of Judas, and he still went ahead with what he was set on doing. And it reminds us too that when our service might be rejected by people in the world and ridiculed by people in the world, what do we do?

[19:00] Well, we just go on and do what we have to do. Just as Jesus went on, despite the fact that he knew in the face of what he knew about Judas. So it's Christ's action in relation to what he knew as well as in relation to who he was.

Thirdly, it's Christ's action in relation to how we must live. And that brings us more into his interaction with Peter. It's important we take all of these verses leading up to that just so that we're setting John, the way John is setting the background and following him before we come to the interaction with Peter himself.

Now here is Peter, and the Lord has poured the water into the basin, and he's beginning to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel that was wrapped around him. And you can just picture Peter, he's just looking around, he's seeing the other disciples there, and the Lord going from one to one.

And then he comes to Peter himself. And Peter says to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? And these words are emphatic in the Greek text of the New Testament here in this passage.

The words you and my, they're very emphatic in this verse. Peter is really saying, Lord, do you, are you really going to wash my feet? Why is he saying this?

[20:22] Why is he refusing this? Why doesn't he want the Lord to wash his feet? Well, you see, because this is really pretty much the same as we saw back in Matthew 16, where the Lord had taught him about how he was going to Jerusalem, and how he would be mistreated, and how he would be put to death.

Lord, this shall not happen to you. Put this far away from you. And even now, Peter hasn't grasped the essence of the Lord's saving work is the work of a servant, the work of going through even to the death of the cross.

For Peter, this is the wrong way around. He should be washing the Lord's feet, not the Lord washing his feet. And from that point of view, it's commendable.

It's because Peter understood the status of Jesus to whatever extent he did, but he knew who Jesus was, and he knew that this just seemed to be the wrong way around.

He hadn't yet got the point that Christ had come in essence as a servant, and that that was how his people would be saved.

[21:32] And so, for ourselves as well, you might say that the humility of Jesus begins with his readiness to serve us, and our humility begins with our readiness to receive his service.

Christ's humility begins with his readiness to serve us, to serve his people. Where does our humility begin? It begins with our readiness to receive his service, to embrace that, to make it ours, to say

that's what I must live by.

And he says, what I'm doing now, you do not know now, but you shall know afterwards. He meant by that, of course, that after the death and the resurrection, and then following Pentecost as well, Peter would then, taught by the Spirit especially, he would then come to realize what had happened here as he had never realized it before.

And indeed, you can see the proof of that in the way that Peter wrote in his first epistle in chapter 2, where he's setting out Jesus as an example that we should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he reviled, he did not revile in return. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[23 : 02] By his wounds, you have been sealed. You have been healed. You see, he's now saying as he wrote that, now I understand what he meant, what he did when he washed our feet.

Now I understand why he had to be a servant, what the purpose for that was, and how we have benefited from that. It's in relation to how we must live.

But you see, he goes on in that to show Peter where he says, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

That's an important point. When we yield our lives to Christ by his grace, it's to this Jesus that we're yielding our lives. Not any Jesus that people make up, not any Jesus that we might prefer for ourselves, but this one, the serving one, the one who has loved us even to that extent.

If I do not wash you, you have no share with me. If we don't submit to this Christ, to this Jesus, that instantly cancels out any share and benefits from him.

[24 : 19] You have no share with me unless I wash you. A refusal would seal our lostness.

And then it moves on to the next point. Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And you might say, well, isn't that just typical Peter?

He started off with a refusal, saying, do you wash my feet? And then saying, Lord, you shall never wash my feet. And then when the Lord said to him, if I don't wash you, you have no share with me, well, he then says to the Lord, Lord, not my feet only, my hands on my head, do the whole thing then.

It's really Peter again, isn't it, just going from one extreme to the other, if you like, this impetuous emotional man, this man who loves the Lord so much and yet sometimes gets things so wrong.

But there's an important point here as well. It really means effectively in a spiritual sense, complete surrender. Lord, not just my feet, but also my hands and my head, don't leave any part of me unwashed.

[25 : 36] the surrender of our whole person is what Christ requires and indeed what Christ's love demands.

The love that's stooped to serve. What other kind of response does that deserve but the response that says, Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head, my whole person.

Have you come to surrender your whole person to Jesus, to this Jesus, to this Christ, to this Lord? Is it the case with you that you've only given him so far, just something of your life, your church attendance, your outward conduct?

have you given him your heart? Have you given him your relationships? Have you given him your private self?

Have you given him what you are in your place of work? Have you given him what you are in relation to others in the world? Have you given him all aspects of service possible to you?

[26 : 58] Have you given him all your gifts that he has endowed you with? Or are you just content or am I just content tonight to partially, as it were, give ourselves to him?

Just by feet, Lord, that'll do. No, it won't do. That'll never do for him. And he deserves the whole person, you and I.

that commitment, that complete surrender, is what Jesus is calling us to tonight. That complete surrender.

Maybe you haven't done that yet. Maybe it's in your heart to do it and you're still putting it off or maybe not sure. Maybe it's something you really desire was true of you, but you've held back to this moment.

Well, just look, if you will, for this moment into the love of Christ, look into this love that stoops to serve. Look at it very closely.

[28 : 00] Study it. Think about it hard. Can you leave aspects of your life ungiven to him now?

Can you really say, Lord, I appreciate what it says about how far you went in loving your people, love? I don't want to commit myself completely to you yet.

This is love that demands an answer from us, that demands our complete surrender to him, everything we can give him of ourself, of our works, of our gifts.

And then there's an unselfish replica mentioned on the part of Christ as the chapter goes on. So Christ's action in relation to how we must live, he has an understandable reluctance, Peter, which Jesus then addresses, and then this unmistakable requirement of submitting to this Jesus or else there's no share with him, no benefit.

And then this unhesitating response of Peter, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And then Jesus proceeds later on and says, when he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, in verse 12, he says, do you understand what I have done to you?

[29 : 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 also should do just as I have done to you.

And you need to go on further in the chapter to verses 34 and 35, where he speaks about a new commandment I give you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one for another. He's joining together the idea of washing their feet and loving them.

We've already seen how it's this love that really leads to that action of washing their feet and demonstrating his love as a servant as they come to benefit from that.

And now he says a new commandment. Now this commandment wasn't new in one sense, it was always the case. Right through the Old Testament, that God's commandment was, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself.

[30 : 38] Why is he calling it new? Because it had never been shown before by God on his knees. That's why it's new.

Because it's seen in Jesus the servant. This new commandment, as they have now seen it as never before, demonstrated in the love that stoops to serve.

I have given you an example, that you should wash one another's feet. Of course, he doesn't mean that literally, unless you're a nurse, or in some position to do that.

What he means is spiritually wash one another's feet. In other words, minister to each other in a way that helps, that relieves, that takes some pressure along with others of stresses and strains in life.

Let me ask myself this question, how many feet did I wash last week? How many feet do I intend to wash this coming week, God willing? How many people will I practically minister to?

[31 : 53] How do you wash the feet of others? There are so many ways of doing that. Neighbors that are perhaps confined to the house, people you know in hospital, people who are lonely, don't get many visitors, people who are anxious about certain things, refugees that have come to live amongst us, looking to them, asking them, are they okay, providing for their needs?

All kinds of practical needs that we can minister to, really that amounts to washing on another's feet, bringing some measure of relief.

love. What a wonderful difference it makes to someone confined to their home, perhaps with no family nearby, who feel the time long.

What a difference it makes just to have somebody come in and say, would you like me to share a cup of tea with you? Let's have a chat for half an hour. It makes their day. You've washed their feet. And you can multiply that and find all kinds of different examples as to how to wash one another's feet. It's a practical demonstration, isn't it, of Christian love, just as it follows the example of Jesus.

[33 : 15] And that's why John, when he came to write his first letter, that's why we find that he wrote in his first letter and at chapter three, where he wrote about loving one another and how that is also following the example of God's own love, where he comes to say in chapter three, verses 16 to 18, by this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

And even if you don't go, need to go to that extent, which we seldom do. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth, in action, patterned on the action of Jesus, the love which stoops to serve, not in theory, but actually, practically.

And so he leaves you, and he leaves me with this question that he put to the disciples. disciples, do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, that's who I am.

So if I, then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. Do you realize, do you understand what I have done to you?

[34 : 49] love, this love which stoops to serve, this love of Jesus, surely our only response, our only adequate response, is in the words of Isaac Watts in his great hymn, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, where the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Let's pray. Gracious and eternal God, we give thanks that your demonstration of your love to us has come to us in such a remarkable way.

For God commends his love to us, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, this is your own truth, O Lord, as you impress upon our hearts the cost of our redemption.

O Lord, take away, we pray, any reluctance from our hearts this evening, each one of us, to enter into that lowliness of service, to come to be followers of Jesus practically, as well as in other ways. we ask that your word, Lord, will bear that fruit in our lives in days to come, and help us constantly and consistently to dwell our mind upon this love of the Son of God who stooped to serve needy sinners like we are, so that we may carry forth that love for him in our lives from day to day.

[36 : 43] Hear us now, we pray, for your own name's sake. Amen. We're concluding our service this evening in Psalm 36, Psalm number 36, and at verse 5, that's on page 44.

Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, it reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, extends, descending to the sky. Your righteousness is very great, like mountains high and steep. Your justice is like ocean depths, both man and beast. You keep so through to verse 9, Psalm 36, your steadfast love is great, O Lord.

Your steadfast love is great, O Lord, yourhold of the heart here.

Yourδ..... of the land where people come full with the■ iw Extending to the sky Extending to the sky Extending to the sky Your righteousness is very great Like mountains high on sea Like mountains high on sea Your justice is like ocean death Old man of peace to me Old man of peace to me

[38 : 56] Old man of peace to me Our precious is your sacrifice What confidence it brings What confidence it brings Both high and low I shelter in The shadow of your wings The shadow of your wings The shadow of your wings Lay peace within your hearts and drink From streams of your delight

From streams of your delight Far with you is the source of light In your life we see light In your life we see light In your life we see light In your life we see light I'll go to the main door this evening After the benediction Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ The love of God the Father And the communion of the Holy Spirit Be with you now and evermore Amen