God Serves

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[0:00] as we read John 13, is that God is a God who serves. We've just sung that Jesus Christ is the servant king. So, if you're reading John 13, read it with these lenses on, that God is a God who serves. Now, this may sound strange. It certainly sounded strange during the Roman Empire. It certainly sounds strange in perhaps other parts of the world, because in other parts of the world, and especially during the Roman Empire, gods don't serve you, you serve them. So, while you're sat here listening to John 13, the most striking thing about it, which we can often lose sight of, is the fact that God, who ought to be served, is actually serving us. Now, as this plays out, we are to serve, but we're to serve to be like him, not because he needs something. And so, with that said, we now learn a lesson that we've learned before, but it's one that I would encourage you never to forget, because it highlights God's love to a level that no human love can match. And the only way you can get to understand it is simply this way, that God is in need of nothing. God is in need of absolutely nothing. He doesn't need me. He doesn't need you. He doesn't need anything. So, if God doesn't need anything, then why does God bother with us at all? Well, remember the lesson. He chooses, out of his love, to love us. Now, he doesn't need us, and therefore he doesn't need anything from us. So, any involvement that we have with God is totally for our benefit, not for his. And that's the point. When you understand that God is in need of nothing, you understand that in that relationship, you are the beneficiary.

That when you understand that God is in need of nothing, you understand that you are the receiver of all things that God has. So, when Jesus gets to that point in this passage where he talks about sharing in him, that's the point. The reason why God sent his son is not to get something from you, but to give something to you. But most people still think about God that he is demanding, that he wants this, he wants that. He wants change, and he gave Jesus to create that change, but he's not demanding something from us that he hasn't first given to us. Okay? That's a pretty important lesson, that God is not demanding something from us that he has not given to us in the first place. And God, in many respects, is not demanding at all. So, God serves us, and he serves us by giving us his son. One of the ways that we get to see this, the way that it's illustrated, is that Jesus, as an example, as an illustration, decides to wash the disciples' feet. Peter, being Peter, says, you're not going to do mine. Now, I don't think this had anything to do with the condition of his feet. It might have done, but I think it's more likely that it had to do with he knew who Jesus was. And that when you understand who Jesus is, surely, Jesus, you shouldn't be doing something like this. You know, Jesus, God the Son, the triune God of Scripture, doesn't bow at my feet to wash them. God doesn't do that. And what you have here is God saying, no, that's exactly what I do. That's exactly what I do. I am the God who comes down, comes down to a level lower than you, or equal with you, and serve you in this way. This is the God who loves us. This is the God who is in need of nothing, decides to come and serve us in this way. And there's only one explanation for why he does this because he loves us. You can't explain it any other way other than the fact that he loves us in such a way that he wants us to share in him. He wants to share himself with us. And we don't tend to think about God like that. We think that there is such a separation between the triune God of Scripture and us mere mortals that God wouldn't behave in that way. But that's exactly the way that God is behaving, okay? He sends his Son to serve us so that we can come and share in him. So here's a summary of these 30 verses. Jesus is in the upper room. He already knows that one of the disciples are going to betray him. And I don't know if you've ever been in the position of betraying Jesus, but I've certainly seen it quite often. Remember, at the very heart of Judas' betrayal was a very simple question, and that is, what will you give me so that I can hand over Jesus to you? In other words, what will you exchange for Jesus? And remember, Romans 1 says, if you can remember, that the root of all sin is firstly exchanging God. You just exchange God. And the danger

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is we can exchange Jesus all the time and not even recognize that we're doing it. Judas sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, okay? That's what he got for Jesus. Now, he got a lot more, which he didn't like, but that's what he got. His heart was inclined that way. So this is a danger that Judas has, okay? And it's a danger that disciples are not even aware of because when Jesus says that there is a betrayer in this room, they don't even know who it is, which means that if they don't know who it is, they also don't know that it couldn't be them.
Now, I think if you're honest with yourself, at least just a little bit, you will admit that you have done things that you never imagined yourself doing, or at least thinking, or at least saying.
That you think, where on earth did that come from? Well, the disciples recognized that they are such people. That it's not beyond them to be unfaithful. That it's not beyond them to sin.
[6:28] That it's not beyond them, perhaps with whatever it may be in thought, would indeed, to do something that not only displeases Jesus, but betrays him. Remember Peter. Peter denied being a follower of Jesus. He ended up in a mimetic rivalry situation where he realized that the best way to hide from being a follower of Jesus was to join the crowd of people persecuting Jesus. What better way to hide from Jesus than in people who don't follow Jesus? It's the perfect hiding place, because followers of Jesus aren't seen around here. So Jesus knows that he is dealing with someone who is going to betray him, but he also knows he's dealing with a group of disciples who don't know whether or not it could be them. In other words, it's not beyond me. You know, there are some people who suffer with overconfidence, okay, and their falls are often great. But the trouble is, if you suffer without overconfidence, you look back on your fall and not even recognize that it was a fall. It just doesn't seem to register. So Jesus is up here in the upper room with a betrayer, with his disciples. He washes the feet of all of them, including the betrayer. And the lesson to all of this is, you cannot belong to God unless Jesus serves you. Okay? You cannot belong to God unless Jesus serves you. Let me just try and put that another way around, okay? You cannot belong to God by serving God yourself.

Okay? You cannot belong to God by serving God yourself. You have to belong to God by Jesus serving you. Now, you may have a whole bucket full of good works, and that's good, but they don't get salvation. The only thing that accomplishes salvation is Jesus serving you. And the ultimate service is his death on the cross. And that's what we come on to now. When Jesus uses this word, hour, in verse 1, he knows the hour only means one thing. All the way through John, that word hour only ever means one thing, the cross. When Jesus says that his hour has come, he's basically saying that it's time for me to die on the cross. In John 2, when his mother comes up to him and says, you know, can you do a miracle because we've run out of wine? He says to her, my hour has not yet come. Okay? His mind is on his, the reason why he's really there, everybody else's mind is on something else. But now, the hour has come.
Jesus will have to die on the cross. Okay? Because that's his choice. The moment God decides to love us, the cross is unavoidable. I want you to think about that, the cost of God's love for us. That the moment God decided to love us, the moment he decided to do that, meant that his son must die on the cross.
Because that was the only way to forgive. That is the only way to deal with sin. That is the only way to make us perfect. And God does make us perfect in Christ Jesus. So, God's love came at a huge cost to himself and that his son was willing to pay. God loves us and the way that he loves us is by giving his son to the cross. We think, perhaps, that God should love us in other ways. You know, perhaps answer a few of my prayers, Lord. Perhaps give me this and keep that far from me. Then I would know you really love me. No. No, you wouldn't really know that God loves you from that. The way that you really get to experience God's love is by God doing something for you which you cannot do for yourself and something that you need even beyond your own recognition. And one of those things is, we need to be forgiven for a lot. And that's because we don't really see just how dangerous sin is. And another reason why God gives us his son, and this is spelled out in the Old Testament, is because nobody wants to meet God without Jesus. Okay? There are going to be people in the future who are going to meet God without Jesus. You do not want to do that. Because Jesus is the one who, on the cross, takes the judgment of God so that when we get to meet Jesus, we don't have to face the judgment of God. Those who meet God without Jesus only have one thing to look forward to, and that's judgment. So, the reason why Jesus is so central to this issue is because Jesus is the central issue. God loves us and serves us by giving us Jesus. In other words, you can only belong to God by belonging to Jesus. And the way you belong to Jesus is by turning,

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by trusting, repenting, which simply means you turn from one to him. Very simple. As I said the other night, repentance is fairly simple to understand, but often confused. And that is, I cannot turn from this wall to that wall and face that wall at the same time. I just cannot do it. So, repentance is turning from your own way to God's way and not going back to your own way. That's simply to turn again.
So, true repentance that Jesus speaks of is a true turning to him without, and that means, necessary, you have to turn away from your own way. Now, this is a lesson that the disciples here are learning. And the way that they learn it is by Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Now, Peter says, no, okay, just don't wash my feet, because he hasn't understood, he hasn't grasped that he must be served by God in this way. Now, the feet washing is an illustration of the cross to come. [12:53] That's how we are made clean before God. So, this is just an illustration. But the moment Peter understands what Jesus is saying, that unless I wash you, unless I clean you, you can have no share in me, the next thing that comes out of his mouth is, well, don't stop there, Lord. Make sure you do my body, my hands, my head, do everything. In other words, he understands that the issue of belonging to God is an issue that concerns the whole of me. I want to belong to God fully. All my thoughts, all my words, all my deeds, my heart, my body, my soul, everything must belong to me and must belong to God. And everything must be cleaned in order to belong to God. Okay? When God requires us as his people, Jesus doesn't bring us in from the garden where we have been filthy and muddy and sin, and then says, oh, and by the way, children, we are going to meet God today. Now, he says, not in that state you're not. He cleans us, and he cleans us at the cross. He presents us before God. And believe this or not, I know this is hard to imagine as we look at each other in the church, but when God looks at you this morning, if you belong to Jesus, if you're found in Jesus, when God looks at you this morning, you are perfect. I look at you, I don't see that. You know, you're a lovely bunch, you know,

I mean, you know, and I love you. But, and when you look at me, you see the same thing. You know that I'm not perfect. You know that I have my failures. But the point is, is that in Christ Jesus, God doesn't see any of those things. He knows that they're there. But the issue here is what you are to God when you belong to Jesus. And what you are to God when you belong to Jesus is perfection. Totally clean.
Totally forgiven. And how did you get that way? Because Jesus served you. How did you get that way? Jesus washes you. And that's how you come to have a sharing God, because Jesus gets you there.
So I think this point is clear, but I'm going to labor it. I'm going to lay it on thick, just so that you know. Okay? We get to belong to God by Jesus serving us. Okay? I'm going to say it again. You can only get to belong to God by Jesus serving you. Now, I've met people who want to argue the point, and I'm not interested in arguing the point with them. One, because after a small conversation, it's easily seen and proven that they're talking gibberish, the point here is, is that Jesus and only Jesus, God's Son, can get us to belong to God. And the reason he wants us to belong is because he loves us. He loves us. The issue here that needs addressing then is what type of disciple are you? Well, you say, well, there's only one type of disciple. Well, there is, but we're dealing with a passage where Judas is also following Jesus with all the other disciples.
And if you just discount for a moment, or not discount it, but just remember it in the background, yeah, there is the issue of Satan. Yes, there is the issue of him selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. The real issue here is that he's a faithless follower. He's with the other disciples, but he does not have faith in Jesus like the other disciples. He follows Jesus around, but he does not belong to Jesus. And so, Jesus knows who the betrayer will be because the betrayer is always going to be marked by faithlessness in him. So, whatever else we consider Judas Iscariot to be, and Judas has got a bad rap over the years, and he's got a bad rap for good reasons, or at least for the reasons that gave him that kind of reputation. The thing not to overlook here is that right from the very beginning, Judas is faithless in following Jesus. He is a faithless follower. He is a follower. He goes geographically, at least, everywhere where Jesus goes, but spiritually, he's nowhere to be found. Mentally, emotionally, fully, nowhere to be found. In fact, Judas is constantly moving further and further away from Jesus.
[17:35] Okay? Now, I understand that Judas Iscariot is a special case because you've got the involvement of the 30 pieces of silver, which is a fulfillment of something spoken of in the Old Testament. You've also got Satan being involved. You know, this is a special case in terms of why

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Judas was what he was. But even if you set that aside, the thing that marks him out from the other disciples is the fact that he is still a faithless follower. Jesus calls us to have faith and follow him. It's really quite simple.

The way that we get to have faith in Jesus is by listening to him. In Romans, it says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God, which tells us that as you listen to Jesus, you can listen to Jesus with no faith at all, and then all of a sudden, have Jesus, have faith after you've heard what he said. Because faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. And so, as you listen with no faith at the end of listening, you can then have faith.

So, the idea of the word of God being central is central. Okay? The reason why the word of God must be preached more and more each day, not just on the Lord's Day, is because it is the only thing that produces faith. You know, I don't expect my children to follow Jesus at all unless I'm speaking to them the words of Jesus. Because if I did, all I'm producing is faithless followers. We don't want to do that. Okay? We need to understand what the Bible teaches, how it teaches it, and what produces faith. The reason why the gospel must be in the home, the reason why the gospel must be in the church, the reason why the gospel must be in Sunday school, is because we don't want to produce faithless followers. Okay? Faith is produced by the word and no other way. When Jesus serves Peter here, it's also done in the context of serving all the other disciples. And the point is, if you want to belong to God, or as you belong to God, Jesus must serve you. That the feet washing is simply an illustration of the cross to come. That at the cross, this is where Jesus will make us perfect.

That at the cross, this is where all that sin and dirt and everything is washed away. So the reason Jesus saves us comes on to the example that he gives us, and that is he wants us to be like him. Now, I want you to listen carefully to this, because this is fairly important. In verse 14, Jesus tells his disciples to serve one another. Then in verse 15, he says, the reason I have done this is to give you an example of how to serve one another. Okay? Now, Jesus is not expecting us in the church today to wash each other's feet. That would be to miss the point entirely.

Washing someone's feet back in the day when you're walking around in sandals in a dusty road, that makes a lot of sense. Although I do walk around in flip-flops most of the time on dusty roads. [20:57] But that aside, okay, the issue here is the example of the level of service. If God is willing to get down on his knees and wash my feet, then who am I to reject any lower form of service?

It makes, okay, if God has gone down to that level, then who am I to say, I'm not doing that? Okay, I can say it, but that is not the example that Jesus is setting. And Jesus saves us so that we would be like him. And the reason he wants us to serve, it's like that tree in Psalm 1. Trees don't eat their own fruit. Okay? Other people eat the fruit of trees. So the reason we're to stay close to God, the reason we're to be like Jesus, is so that we are a benefit to other people. And if we're not like Jesus, then we're not a benefit to other people at all. In fact, we're a burden. Okay?

So becoming like Jesus doesn't just have you in mind, but becoming like Jesus has everyone else in mind. I'm going to give you a little illustration. A lady by the name of Elizabeth Elliot, who was the wife of Jim Elliot, the book Through the Gates of Splendor, gave this apocryphal story. In other words, the story's not true, but it makes the point brilliantly. And she tells us a sort of a made-up story of Jesus and his disciples to make a point.

And this is what she said. One day, Jesus is walking with his disciples along the way. And as he's walking along the way, he looks at his disciples and tells them to pick up a stone, and most importantly, to carry it for me. So Jesus looks at his disciples, says to them, pick up a stone and carry it for me. Peter thinks, well, Jesus didn't say how big the stone had to be.

You know, he didn't, he wasn't that specific. So Peter bends down, picks up the nearest, smallest stone to his feet, doesn't make any effort, and picks it up. And yes, he carries it.

[23:11] All the other disciples pick up their stone. Then Jesus comes beside a tree. And then in the story, Elizabeth Elliot has Jesus saying to the disciples and to the stones, I turn these stones into bread. And poor old Peter has nothing to eat. All the other disciples are there eating away, you know, they've walked a long way. Now they have something to eat. Jesus does provide. But poor old Peter, it's less than a crumb that he's eating. As they get up from the tree, they go on for a walk again. And Elizabeth Elliot, in her story, has Jesus telling the disciples, say, pick up another stone and carry it for me. Well, this time, Peter's learned his lesson.

So he picks up this gigantic stone on the verge of not actually being able to carry it. But he's carrying it. And then Jesus takes them beside the river. And he tells his disciples to throw it in the

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water. And Peter now is both tired and hungry. And then Elizabeth Elliot, brilliantly, as only Elizabeth Elliot could, I mean, she had a brilliant mind, absolute brilliant mind. If you read her book, No Graven Image, you'll see just how great she is in her thinking.
She has Jesus turning to Peter and saying this, and who are you carrying the stone for? You're carrying it for you or you're carrying it for me?
In both instances, he was told to carry the stone for Jesus. But what he was really doing was carrying the stone for himself. In the first case, I'll make it as easy as possible. In the second case, I'll try and get the most out of it I can for myself. Okay? Who are you carrying the stone for? I once met a lady who was a carer. And she started asking me questions that were, you know, sort of pretty, pretty direct. And I said, what is the actual issue? She said, well, I'm a carer. So I said, okay, but can I ask you a simple question? And this was out in the open. It wasn't private. So everybody got to hear. Because it was sort of an open discussion, but it was a discussion about care for elderly people. And she said, quite honestly, do you know, these caring for elderly people makes me feel good. Getting them into the right homes and looking after them in their home makes me feel really good. And I said, do you know, it's absolutely fantastic that you're able to care for old people? But I said, can I ask you a question? She said, go ahead.
I said, if those old people weren't there, how would that make you feel? I feel terrible. I wouldn't know what to do with myself. So I said, okay, who's serving who? Who's serving who? In other words, it is possible, isn't it? To serve others simply to serve ourselves. To do for others simply on the premise of what can I get out of it for myself. The example that Jesus sets here is a service that has their best interest in heart beyond your very own. Now, you may get great enjoyment out of serving other people and there is nothing wrong with that. There may be a reciprocal thing there, but the motivation here for serving others is their best interest. And the reason why it must be that, because if it isn't that, there will be a limit to what you do. Okay, let me say that again.
[27:00] If it isn't that, there will be a limit to what you do, because you'll only serve to the point of your interest, not theirs. And that's the example that Jesus sets. The reason why you see some people in the church go out of their way for other people is because they've become like Jesus. When you see them serving their mum as they've got old on the verge of passing away, when you see them serving their mum or their dad and suddenly they have Alzheimer's or dementia and they're tired and they could do with the rest and yet they're there doing it, those people, there's nothing in it for them. There's that great love for the other person, but there's nothing but tiredness and hard work. That's where you see Christ in people. So, when Jesus sets up this example of service, that's what he does.

Here's a few considerations then as we close. If we want to be the type of people and the type of community that looks like this, then we need Jesus first to serve us so that we can belong to God. And once Jesus has served us and belonged to God, we then need to understand that the example that Jesus has set us is absolutely earth-shattering. And it's earth-shattering for this reason. If it doesn't exist, I'm obligated to start it. If it doesn't exist, I'm obligated to build it. Let me put it a slightly different way, in a way that I think will resonate. There's nothing for me here in this church. There's nothing for other people here in this church. There's nothing for my children here in this church. Okay, there's something for this child of mine who's this age, but there's nothing for this child of mine who's that age. Okay, well then if that's the case, it's your obligation to build it. Jesus has given you an example of how to serve others and now left you with the obligation to serve others. So, if it doesn't exist, I have, if you go into the manse whenever you come, I have written on the window in white chalk pen, which my wife's not too pleased about, but there it is, to remind me every day I enter into that room, if a Christian culture doesn't exist, then I am obligated to build one. And the reason I have that is because I have something on my mind that I want to see happen in the next couple of years, and every time I look at the window, I see that. And the reason I see that is because I don't want to forget and think, well, if it's going to happen, I'll just wait till somebody else does it, and I'll go and be served. No, if it doesn't exist, then I and you are obligated to build it. And that's the example that Jesus gives us here. Okay, it's an example of service that has completely the other person in mind. So, when it comes to God, and when it comes to Jesus, and when it comes to you, remember, God is in need of nothing. When he serves you, he only has you in mind. When he loves you, he serves you in this way, because that is the only way that you can get to belong to God. And the reason he serves you in this way is because it doesn't exist. You don't belong to God. So, God, out of his own love is now obligated to make it happen. And the way

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that he makes it happen is by giving you his son. So, remember, the only way to belong to God is by Jesus serving us. Amen.

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