

The cross shaped life - Christ has priority

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[0 : 0 0] So, if you're the kind of person who has been tracking where we have been in terms of sermons over the last few years, you'll know that John 13 is something that we've looked at at least a couple of times in just over the eight years that I've been here.

We're only going to be looking at John 13, the first 20 verses this morning, because in our series in John, which we've never finished, we're actually, should be around about John 17 with the prayer of Jesus.

Now, this is what we'll move into when we begin our Easter meditations, where we start thinking predominantly about the cross and the cross-shaped life and the implications of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But for this morning, this is a bit of a navigation reading. In other words, it sets your bearings, I think, for the whole of life, not just for the beginning of a new year.

And so, we're going to read together the first 20 verses. So, now hear God's word. Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

[1 : 3 0] 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 had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

He laid aside his outer garments and, taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with a towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, do not wash my feet. And Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand.

Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet, but also my hands and my head.

And Jesus said to him, the one who has bath does not need to wash except for his feet, but it is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.

[2 : 4 3] For he knew who was to betray him. That is why he said, not all of you are clean. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, do you understand that I have done to you what I have done to you?

You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. For 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. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. I am not speaking of all of you. I know whom I have chosen, but the scripture will be fulfilled.

He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. I am telling you this now before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I am he.

[3 : 52] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send, receives me. And whoever receives me, receives the one who sent me.

Well, may God bless his word to us this morning. We're going to come before God in song, and then we're going to come back to the message of that word.

So, at least, before God, try and have a plan in my heart and mind going into a new year. And this has changed slightly over this week.

I thought I had it all planned out, very similar to last year. And then, you know, you pray through things, you write notes down, and suddenly the plan changes. But as of next week, we're going to be going through the priority of Christ all the way through the New Testament.

This is something that we've never done before, but I think it will be good for us as a church to focus primarily on Christ in each book of the New Testament. So, it's not an overview of each book, but it will be a focus of Christ in each book, if that makes sense.

[5 : 06] I was going to do that series throughout the evenings, but I thought, no, you know, for lots of different reasons, that it's probably best if it happens in the morning.

The evening, of course, will take a different shape. So, this message, this evening's message, is going to focus primarily on the subject of why Christ takes priority and why the cross is really the priority or it ought to be the priority in our lives.

Now, the difficulty here is if you try and make it a priority, you will fail to do so. It has to become a priority. And you're going to say, well, how can something become a priority if I don't make it a priority?

Well, this is the very thing that Jesus addresses here in John 13. And this is what we need to understand when it comes to understanding what it means to be left with an example.

Because when someone gives you an example to follow, it means then that you have to go and do the same thing. And therefore, you do what they did and therefore it balances out.

[6 : 10] Well, that's true in some examples between us, but it's not true when it comes to the example that Christ gives to his disciples because the example carries with it far-reaching implications.

So, if I can just lay the ground just briefly about what John's gospel is about, it would simply be this. That John says at the end of his gospel, the reason why he's written the gospel.

And he says, I have written these things down so that those who believe them might have life in Christ Jesus. Okay? So, these things have been recorded. Jesus did loads of other things that could be written down, but I've not mentioned any of those.

I could have done. But the things that have been written have been written so that by believing them, you may have life in Christ Jesus. You may have life in the Son. Now, this is said directly after Jesus' conversation with Thomas, where Thomas is doubted that Jesus is alive.

And then Jesus says to him, well, put your hand in my side, your finger in my side, see for yourself. As soon as Jesus says that, he says to Thomas, well, blessed are those who have never seen and yet believe.

[7 : 25] And what John is pointing out is that the power of the word of God for those who believe has an effect on them that is equivalent to you putting your hand in the side of Jesus.

In other words, you are as convinced about Jesus Christ as Thomas was when he put his finger in the side of Jesus. That's what John is saying about the power of the word of God.

That when Jesus says, blessed are those who have never seen yet believe, John then interprets that by saying, if you read these words and you believe them, you have life in the Son.

You are as convinced about Jesus as Thomas became convinced about Jesus the moment he touched them. That's what a true conviction from the word of God means.

No doubts. Now, of course, you can have doubts through life. And of course, that's part of human nature. It also actually affirms God because the psalmist point out that if a Christian doubts God, if a believer in the Old Testament doubting God, God must exist in order for him to be doubted.

[8 : 33] In other words, if God has done something in the past and you're waiting on him to do the same thing again in the future and it's not turning up, you begin to doubt. But you begin to doubt precisely because you know that God has done something like that in the past.

God can do it. So those kind of doubts actually come out of a conviction that God exists and can do rather than out of a conviction that God's not around and he's not doing anything.

It is precisely because God has done it in the past that sometimes we can doubt whether or not he's going to do it again in the future. So when it means to believe the word, it doesn't mean that you're doing something essentially.

It also means that something is happening to you as you believe these words. There is that power of conviction that comes from God to you. It's that way around, not just this way around.

So here's the summary then of the section that we have just read together. Jesus has come to the point where he recognizes that it is time to prepare for the cross.

[9 : 41] This is in direct contrast to perhaps John, earlier on in John when he's at the wedding of Cana, where he provides the first miracle of turning water into wine.

And he says, you know, my hour has not yet come. And Jesus at the wedding at Cana is thinking about his death, okay, in one respect, because he's saying my hour has not yet come.

Here in the beginning of John 13, the hour has come. And any time John uses this reference to the hour, it is in reference to Jesus' death on the cross and everything that will follow.

But until that happens, the disciples have to go through several things. They have to learn several things at the feet of Jesus. This means that everything that Jesus is about to teach them, they have to take in and remember.

But Jesus reminds them later on that the Spirit of God will come and bring to their remembrance all the things that they fail to remember or all the things that they have been taught. But in order to bring that conviction home, that comes with the power and working of God the Holy Spirit.

[10 : 50] That happens in that context. Now we come to this foot washing. Jesus is going around. He takes off his outer garment and he begins to wash the feet of Peter.

And Peter doesn't like the fact that his feet are being washed at the hands of Jesus. This is something that is left for a slave. It shouldn't be given to the Son of God.

But Jesus is pointing out here that unless Peter has his feet washed by Jesus, which is pointing to something far greater, then he cannot belong to Jesus.

The point here is to recognize that Jesus must do something for us in order for us to belong to him. This is what we see in verse 8 in particular. That Jesus must do something for us in order that we can belong to him.

What is then to take effect? Well, the next shape that your life takes is different than its previous shape. Once you were unclean and now you're clean. Once you were this kind of person, but now you are a new person.

[11 : 57] In other words, the change that Jesus brings is a change that is in direct contrast to what you were before you were saved. The change is then shaped by the cross in your life.

We call this a cruciform life. A life that looks like that it has been shaped by the cross of Christ. It takes up the self-denial. It takes up following the will of God.

And this happens to us. But amongst these group of disciples, there is a man named Judas Iscariot. And he will betray Jesus. Jesus knows that he will do this.

It's indicated a couple of times. But if we read on up to verse 30, we find out that the rest of the disciples are unaware. So much so, they even turn to each other and turn to Jesus and say, Could it be me?

Could it be... Why would a person say that? Well, I think a person says that for exactly the same reason that you say to another person, I never thought they were capable of it. I never thought they would do that such a thing.

[13 : 01] And sometimes you can be the kind of person who does something saying to yourself after you have done it, I never thought that I was the type of person to do that. And the disciples are having that kind of moment.

Could it be me? Am I possible... Am I possibly the one who will betray Jesus? Now, where does your heart and mind have to be if you consider yourself to be the type of person who could do that?

Here we have disciples following Jesus for three years, now questioning whether or not they're the one who's going to betray him. Okay? I think they have a proper evaluation of their life.

I don't think they're depressive. I don't think that they're being hard on themselves. I think they understand just how awful sin is and how what sin can actually make a person do.

Okay? Peter knows this for himself, or he's about to know it, when he denies knowing Jesus. Okay? He falls into the mimetic trap and he just denies knowing... Are you not from Galilee?

[14 : 06] No, that's not me. You must be thinking of someone else. Okay? Why does that happen? Well, firstly, let's point out that we're all subject to it, and therefore we all need this cruciform life in order to not be subject to it.

Peter is different at Pentecost and moving forward than he is at this point. Judas Iscariot, of course, has other things going on because the devil is involved, but he is the one who will betray Jesus.

The disciples, however, question whether or not they could be the type of person to do such a thing. What does this mean? Well, it means this, that it is possible for a person to be amongst God's people, even to be in church, even to be in the presence of Jesus Christ and be unaffected.

This is the type of person who can go into any church, they don't really care what church they go into, whether Christ is preached or not preached, because the word of God isn't taken home.

It isn't taken home. It may have temporal effect while they're listening to it, but after that, it's gone. As soon as the wind blows through their hair, it's gone with it.

[15 : 19] There's no way that can happen. Yeah, that's exactly what happens. They don't care whether they go to church or not. They don't care whether or not they follow Jesus or not.

They don't mind being around Christian people, but they're unaffected by it. Okay? There's a case in point throughout Scripture of different people from different backgrounds of which this is true.

So what is Jesus doing with everything that he's saying and everything that he's revealing about Judas Iscariot? Well, a couple of things. But the most important thing which we will focus on is this. In order to follow Jesus, a necessary change in your life has to happen.

In other words, you have to be a different person to follow Jesus than what you are before you follow Jesus. In other words, the change isn't deciding to follow.

The change is something that happens that causes you to follow. And Jesus, therefore, is set in this example by washing the disciples' feet in such a way that he is demonstrating the accomplishment of the cross.

[16 : 26] Jesus, washing the feet of the disciples, is explaining the cross. Why is he explaining the cross? Well, here. You must be clean.

You must be clean. The cross is where God cleanses us from all sin. This is spoken in Leviticus 16 and Psalm 51. The cross is the place where God has promised throughout the Old Testament that he will cleanse us from our sins.

It's that that causes us to live a life before God. It's that cruciform cleaning that leads us to live a life in a crucified way, a life of self-denial, taking up our cross and following Jesus.

So Jesus is not just setting us an example to follow. Rather, he has given us an example of what the cross will accomplish, which then in turn changes the person who belongs to Jesus.

And then they copy him. Okay? So get the order correct. The foot washing here is Jesus giving us an explanation of the cross, which in turn changes us into the type of person that follows this example.

[17 : 40] In other words, this is not just an example, now copy me. No, it's an example of what will happen to you upon faith in Jesus, which changes you then to serve others like Jesus serves you.

That's the point here. So we're going to look under these, under two headings. Firstly, the washing of Peter's feet. Peter doesn't want his feet to be washed by Jesus, and that's clear.

But Jesus takes the position to teach Peter that if this doesn't happen, verse eight, then Peter cannot belong to Jesus. That this cleansing, because Peter is already clean, you'll notice, he just needs his feet washed because they're dusty.

But the point is, is that that's not the point that Jesus is making. Jesus is given an example of what will happen to him, the type of change that will come upon him.

This means that when a person comes in to contact with Jesus in this way, they are changed. The person who belongs to Jesus after the crucifixion, because of the accomplishment of Christ, is not the same person as they were before it.

[18 : 53] And so when you do a favor for someone else, it may have no effect over them whatsoever. It may not change them in the slightest. You may do a favor for someone, they may pay you back that favor, but you're both the same afterwards as you were before.

If someone's done a great deed for you, the deed may be tremendous, making a big change to your day, or even your week, or even your month, or year, but effectively, it doesn't change you as a person.

Not so with Jesus. What Jesus is doing here is an explanation of the cross, which is telling Peter, and telling the rest of us, what I will do for you, will change you.

Okay? What I'm doing here is not just an example for you to follow, but rather is an example of what will happen to you, which you then will follow in. What Jesus does for Peter is something that any of us could do for each other.

But it would be, it would be to miss the point entirely if we all took our shoes and socks off and started washing each other's feet. That's to miss the point entirely.

[20 : 02] The point being made here is that if we're truly going to serve others in the same way that Jesus serves us, then we have to serve others in such a way that leads them to understand that Jesus is the only true creator of change in their life.

That Jesus is the only one who can create that type of change and that type of relationship with God. Unless Jesus does this for you, you will not be different and you will not belong to God.

That's what Peter is beginning to understand. So when Jesus says to Peter, verse eight, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

This means that not only are we changed by Jesus, but the change that we go through brings us into relationship with the father. Okay? The change that we go through brings us into relationship with him.

Or else verse eight wouldn't make any sense at all. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, if I do not wash you, you will have no share with me. Not that your feet won't be clean, not that you won't be clean, but you won't belong.

[21 : 15] This is telling us that this is not about the washing of feet. This is not about your feet being clean. This is about something far greater of which the foot washing is simply pointing to.

So Jesus washing the feet of the disciples is explaining the cross. Is explaining that at the cross, God cleanses us and brings us into relationship with him.

Therefore, if we're to follow that example, then we are the people called by God to go out in the world to do what? To demonstrate to others that Jesus Christ is the only object of real change in your life who then brings you into relationship with God.

That's called the Great Commission. Everything fits together when we understand this in the terms that Jesus meant it to be understood in. That the example given is that we are then called now to serve people in such a way that they see that true change in their life and relationship with God only happens through Jesus Christ.

And it may be that you do that by washing their feet, but it may be you do it in 101 other different ways. But that's the point that Jesus is making here.

[22 : 30] So yeah, Jesus is giving us an example, but the example that he is giving us is that the cross cleanses us and changes us. That's the example.

He is giving us an example, but that example itself is that only the accomplishment of Christ on the cross changes a person and brings them into relationship with God.

Therefore, go and do this for other people. Now, you can't die for them, but you can certainly point them to Christ who did. You can't change a person, but you can certainly point them to Christ who can change them.

You can't bring them into relationship with God, but you can certainly bring them to the words of God which can do that for them. That's the example that Jesus is giving.

As Jesus uses this example to explain the cross, we use the examples that we have been given, whatever they may be, to do exactly the same thing. Or else, you can go into a care home, one's Christian and one's not, and if you don't see it through the eyes of Christ, they're both doing the same job.

[23 : 36] But are they both doing the same job? If they are, then it's good that people are looked after, but the point is missed entirely by the Christian care home if they don't understand the purpose for why they serve in the way that they do.

If they're doing it in the same way as all the other non-Christian care homes, they're missing the point entirely. Everything is to be permeated by a cruciform life. Okay, and what happens is that when a Christian doesn't understand this, they do this bit, Christian, and they do all the other bits in exactly the same way the world does it.

What are you doing? You're limiting the example. The example that Christ gave us is limited by a limited understanding of what it means for everything to follow a cruciform shape.

Okay, now we're just doing it like everybody else. Okay, we do our Christian things in a Christian way, but we wash cars for our neighbors just like everybody else does. We brush the streets for the council just like every other worker does.

Okay, we teach in schools just like every other teacher does. We police the streets, we firemen, we work in shops just like everybody else does, and that's to miss the point entirely. What you're actually saying by saying that is that the Christian life is limited to the church building, that the Christian life has got massive limitations on it.

[25 : 03] In other words, it doesn't reach out into any of these areas, and that's the very point that Jesus is arguing against. No, it does. It even reaches down even to the work of a slave washing somebody's feet.

It works its way all the way down there. And so, if your understanding of Christianity doesn't get that far, then we've got a problem. We've got a lot to learn, and we've got a lot to understand about a cross-shaped life.

So, secondly, the cruciform life, or the cross-shaped life. I want to say this one thing, that it is impossible for any of us to live a cruciform life unless we have been changed by the cross.

You can't do it. You can't imitate it. In fact, many teachers have said when teaching the fruits of the Spirit that every single one of the fruit, fruits, fruit, you have a fruit bowl, not fruits bowl, get my, can be copied by the world, imitated by the world.

You can have a counterfeit version apart from one. Self-control. You can't, you can't come up with a copy of that. And this is partly to do with the cruciform life and self-denial.

[26 : 29] What, what causes a person to serve the world before they serve themselves? What causes a person to look out for the spiritual benefit of other people before they look out for the spiritual benefit of themselves?

Though, they have to be spiritually strong. But what, what causes a person to be like that? Well, it's, it has to be a person changed by the cross. It has to be a person that is shaped by the cross.

What causes a person to live a life of self-denial? And what causes a Christian not to? Well, we forget about the words of Christ. We have our mind set on the things of man and then we're told by Jesus, just like Jesus had to tell Peter, get behind me, Satan.

For you do not have your mind on the things of God but on the things of man. Here we have Peter just calling Jesus the Messiah. You know, he walked on water with Jesus. He is the first of the disciples to turn to Jesus at the end of Mark 8 and say, Jesus says, who do people say that I am?

The disciples are coming up with a list of different names and Jesus says, but who do you say that I am? And Peter says, you're the Christ. Wow, one of them's got it.

[27 : 48] And then Jesus starts talking about the life of the cross. I have to go and die and Peter says, no Lord, no. And Jesus turns to Peter and says, get behind me, Satan.

Why? Because you do not have your mind set on the things of God but on the things of man. So what causes a disciple of Christ to not live a life that's shaped by the cross?

Well, look at Peter. It's to have your mind set on the things of man and not on the things of God. Peter's an example of that very thing. So it is possible for us, not that I'm recommending it, for a church to be full of Christians or at least partly full of Christians or however many full of Christians throughout the world following Christ and at the same time have your mind set on the things of man and therefore denying the cross ahead of you.

There's no need for you to die, Jesus. No, don't go to the cross and therefore denying the fact that I too must take up my cross, deny myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus which is not something I ever want to do.

I don't wake up in the morning feeling this is a great day to deny myself, take up my cross and follow. I don't feel like that. Okay? I don't do all the things I do throughout the day thinking, do you know what?

[29 : 05] I am so positive today about self-denial, it's unbelievable. You know, I'm just, this year is going to be a year of total self-denial and following, I just, I get out of bed thinking, let's get a coffee.

Right? And I have the coffee and I think, right, let's have another one. And then, you know, and then, and then suddenly I begin to think straight. I don't think anybody gets out of the bed thinking, I want to be like Jesus today.

I think it is a conscious decision because most of us can wake up and go, I don't feel like being like Jesus today. And I think we as Christians have to consciously decide before God, no, I have to, I have to die.

What I want to do has to go because what I want to do is set in my mind, have in my mind rather set on the things of man rather than on the things of God.

And then, of course, one of the reasons why I'm more tempted to do that is because I can work everything out. What do I, what do I mean? Well, you say, well, it's easier for you.

[30 : 13] Everything that you do is about Christianity, right? Well, if I can give you a little bit of background, you know, I did work for a living before I came into the pastorate.

That's not to say that I don't work now, but, you know, pastors don't feel that they, it's the same. It's really, it's a real struggle. You may not believe this. I say it with a smile on my face. It's really difficult, you know, because you do feel sometimes a bit like a fraud, but I'm really pleased that God gave me a working life before I came into ministry, that he, he made me struggle with bills.

He made me struggle with people who didn't pay their, you know, bills on time when I fulfilled a contract for them and, and all of those. I'm glad that I had that.

And so, I know what it's like to go out into a world and not have Christianity permeate everything. And so, we just get on with it because we know what we're doing. We don't have to think about it, we just, just, just do it.

And now you come into the ministry and you realize everything has to be permeated by Christ and everything has to be permeated by the cruciform life. You think, well, hang on a minute, it needed to be that way before I came into the ministry.

[31 : 20] And I can remember trying just how difficult it was to go out onto a building site thinking, right, self-denial, take up your cross. And then you got whoever on one side shouting to so-and-so on the other side with all these expletives in between.

You know, yeah, okay, be like Jesus, be like Jesus. Okay, okay, is it easy? No, it's not easy. But one of the things that becomes apparent, I can remember one of my bosses saying to me that we were working in Bodmin and here I am trying to do all the things that David White taught me.

And David White was a vicar who took me under his wing saying, this is how you become a disciple and this is how you disciple. And so I'm here consciously remembering the lesson from the night before and now out on a building site the following day and we're working in a place called Bodmin on an extension to a bakery.

It was great. We extended the job out. This is taking much longer than we thought it was going to, a few more days at least. And the bakery is called Malcolm Barnekerts, makes the best Cornish pasties in the whole of Cornwall.

And so, you know, and he used to bring us out pasties. This was great. And I'll never forget, not paying any attention to anything else, but we're all sat there eating and John Lewis, the boss who was about 17 and still working on ruse, said, I've never heard you swear.

[32 : 39] Well, I never, I was never conscious of never not swearing. But it just goes to show that when you, and I'm not saying that to sort of promote myself, it's simply to say that when you, when you consciously try and live like Christ, people notice whether or not it comes out or not.

Everything has to permeate into everything else. Now, he didn't see myself deny myself. He didn't see me going to the church on Sunday morning or Sunday evening. All he saw was Daniel doesn't swear.

It's all that he saw. I drank tea and coffee like everybody else. I ate food just like everybody else. I gave grace. But the thing that he noticed was that I didn't swear. It's all that he noticed.

But he noticed. And I guess that if the cruciform life is to permeate everything, then we need to be conscious about it. Because I don't think any of us wake up in the morning thinking, I'm going to be great at self-denial today.

It just doesn't happen. So here's the exhortation then as we close. You need to remember or we need to remember that the foot washing here of Peter or the washing of Peter's feet is an explanation of the cross and an explanation of the change that the cross brings.

[33 : 55] It cleanses us from sin. And it changes us by bringing us into a relationship with God. Okay? It changes us, it cleanses us from sin and it brings us into a relationship with God.

Verse 8. So, it may be tempting to think that I can't do this because I'm not Jesus. Right? And we may live a Christian life that uses that kind of argument.

Well, I can't be expected to do what Jesus did because I'm not Jesus. Jesus did this, he said that, he went there. But because I'm not Jesus, I don't need to give myself a hard time here because I'm never going to be able to do what Jesus did.

Well, you're missing the point. What Jesus did was to change you. And what he did was to change you in such a way so that you would be able to follow the example that he lays out here.

That's the point. So, it may be tempting to say, I'm not Jesus and therefore I can't do what Jesus did. But in the very text that we have read, the explanation that Jesus gives is, is that the cross will change you in such a way so that you're able to follow the example that I'm giving you.

[35 : 05] So that you're able to do what I am doing. Jesus said, if I do not wash you, you can have no share in me. The cross changes us and brings us into relationship with God.

Here's the final consideration then as we close. It's easy to say this and it's easy to say that we even believe it until the point we're tested on it. Okay?

It's easy to say that we can do this until the point we are tested on it. But this is where the test will come. It will not happen inside of this room this morning. It will not happen inside of this room this evening.

It will happen out there. It will happen in the areas that are not yet cruciform. It will happen in the areas where you don't think like Christ in these ways.

It will happen in the areas where you don't behave like Christ in these ways. It will happen in the areas where you are asked for your opinion and you don't give an informed opinion that is one informed by the word of God.

[36 : 09] You don't have to say that it comes from the word of God but at least your mind and heart has to be shaped by the word of God. So what does this mean? It means that the cruciform life is a life that has been given to us.

It's not something that we have to follow it is something that we have. Okay? What Jesus has given us in the explanation of washing Peter's feet is an explanation of what has happened to us.

That we have been changed and we have been brought into relationship with God and because of that because of that we can now follow the example. He has not given us an example that gets us there rather he has given us an explanation of the change that we have gone through so that we can now follow the example that he has given us.

In short John is saying this everything that I have said is so that you may believe and by believing have life in him. Amen.