

John 13:1-17

The Character of Christ Jesus the Servant

Introduction: If it is your first time joining us - Welcome! We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. And along with that we are teaching through the Bible on Sunday mornings - the main themes, message and characters. We are in the middle of a 5 week series on the Character of Christ.

We've considered Jesus the Teacher - Our Rabbi - who calls us to be his disciples - To be with him, to become like him, to do what he did.

Then we considered Jesus the Healer. Looking at how Jesus didn't just heal people from their sicknesses and disease, he came to do a deeper work of healing and restoration - from the destruction that sin has brought into our lives and into the world.

Last week we looked at Jesus the savior. We saw how Jesus is the true and greater older brother who went out looking for us and gladly spent his inheritance, not just asking his life, but giving his life in order to bring us into the incredible, generous and gracious love of the Father. Jesus is the only true Savior who came to seek and save what is lost.

Today we want to consider Jesus the Servant.

Jesus the servant is not a phrase you'll actually find in the Bible. But it is something that is undeniable and unavoidable when talking about the person and career of Jesus. Jesus was a servant. Just read a page of the Gospels to observe how Jesus was always available and at people's service - imagine how much time he spent serving the needy, the demon possessed, the lame, the blind he served each one who came to him... Along with that there are multiple times when Jesus taught his disciples about true leadership and true greatness - he would always emphasize humility and servanthood. - He would say things like whoever would be greatest among you - let him be the servant of all - or in one particular passage when James and John asked their mom to ask Jesus if they could sit on his right and left hand in his kingdom Jesus responded to all of his disciples, **"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be**

your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Paul the Apostle many years later would highlight for the Church in Philippi - the servant oriented work of Jesus in our redemption - as an example that every follower of Jesus is to give close attention to in order to gain the mind and posture of Jesus. **“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:5-11**

1. Jesus the Servant

- 1. “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. During supper, when the devil had already put it 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 the towel that was wrapped around him.” - John 13:1-5**
2. Far from being a one-off act in Jesus ministry, Jesus' foot washing act is picturesque of his whole earthly ministry. This scene has been endlessly preached about, lectured on, written about in books on the subject of leadership and service, it's been illustrated, it's been acted out in films and on the stage, it's been painted on magnificent canvas, and put in stain glass windows.. It's a breathtaking scene as we watch Jesus, the eternal word of God, stoop all the way to the feet of humanity - to wash and cleanse them.

1. John lets us in on the mental space of Jesus going into this context - Jesus knows that the time has come for him to leave this world, having completed his mission to love his people to the uttermost, to the very end...and that the Father had committed all things under his power and that he had come from God, and was going back to God...arose.
 1. This story is an an illustration of that love that John has just talked about - He loved us by going low for us and serving our desperate need.
2. Jesus at this point is at a place of absolute assurance and confidence in who he is, where he has come from, where he is going, and the power and authority he has as the Son of God. His mission has come to it's final hour.
 1. We almost expect after this sentence for Jesus to pronounce his own greatness to the Disciples, or an elaborate explanation about his triumph, as he destroy the works of the devil in his being lifted up on the cross... This is what we usually find when people talk about finding their true selves or being confident in their own identity. And yet we find Jesus, again, doing the opposite of what we expect. Jesus knowing all this about himself stood up from the dinner meal, took off his outer clothing, and dressed himself with a towel, and began to wash the disciples feet and wipe them with the towel he was wearing...
 3. *"The physical description of our new and surprising "waiter's" disrobing and re-robing is probably intended, in John's design, to be a theological picture of Jesus' whole career, but especially of his coming passion: He takes off his purely divine prerogatives from heaven, he puts on his human towel of earthly service to the his world, and he prepares to wash us, his people in his cleansing crucifixion, depicted here as a foot washing... in this way the foot washing becomes a dramatic enactment of the Christology of the hymn in Philippians 2:6-11" - F.D. Bruner, The Gospel of John*

2. Let Jesus Serve You

1. We're told that as Jesus is washing the Disciples feet, he comes to Peter, and in classic Peter form, He objects to his Master's lowly act.

“Lord, you think I’m gonna let you wash my feet?” - Jesus, master, teacher, I will not allow you to go that low, not even for me....

1. Culturally speaking, Peter is absolutely correct in his understanding - Jesus is doing something that is beneath him (and of course this is the whole point). Foot washing, that not only included dirt and grime from the foul roads of ancient times, would also often include animal and human excrement carrying all kinds of filth and disease. Foot washing was beneath even the lowest of servants.

1. *"What makes the fourth Gospel account so extraordinary is that there is no parallel in surviving ancient literature for a person of superior status voluntarily washing the feet of someone of inferior status. Jesus' act therefore represents an assault on the usual notions of hierarchy, a subversion of the normal categories of honor and shame... it is not just an honored teacher who is performing a shameful act but a divine figure with sovereignty over the cosmos who has taken on the role of a slave." - F.D. Bruner*

2. Jesus responds to Peter, **“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”** Peter fired back, **“You shall never wash my feet.”** Jesus answered him, **“If I do not wash you, you have no share or fellowship with me.”**

1. Peter doesn’t understand that Jesus’ washing is symbolic of the work that Jesus will do in washing away our sins through his lowly service of death by crucifixion.
2. But once Jesus implies that this is more important than Peter realizes, that it’s a matter of connectedness with Jesus, He is all in. He wants head, hands, and feet, he wants everything washed, if it means nearness to Jesus. Jesus further explains that what He is doing for him is more than enough - The disciples are completely clean now.

3. What we need to understand about Jesus the Servant is that Jesus’ act of service, before it is an act to emulate, it is first a gift to receive. With passages like this we often jump immediately to the application - Jesus was a servant; Jesus went low, so must we; Jesus washed feet, so must we.... This is true. But it is a Biblical mandate that before you act for God you must first allow him to act for you. Before you serve God and serve others, we must receive and know that

God in Christ, humbled himself, and served us. We must allow Jesus to go low, for our sakes, and receive it, or else we have no part, no portion, no place with him.

1. In essence Jesus says, "If I can't forgive your sins, If I can't wash you, You can't have my presence or my power." If Jesus can't trump our conscience of him serving us or how he serves us, we can't have his companionship. If we think we are too humble, or unworthy to receive Jesus free grace, we will miss out on him entirely.
2. So let Jesus be your Lord and savior by being, as he clearly wishes to be your servant. Apparently Jesus wishes to live much of his Lordship in the service of his people. This is hard to grasp, it needs to be taught again and again, it needs to be believed on again and again...

3. Jesus the Servant is to be Followed and Imitated

1. **"When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? 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. 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." - John 13:12-17**

1. Jesus says he has given us (Disciples) an example or a pattern to follow. No follower of Jesus then is beyond or above this, just as no servant is greater than his master. If Jesus went low, so must we, if we are going to follow him. There is not a single Christian that is exempt from this mandate.
2. In our first study we talked about Jesus being our Rabbi, our teacher. The application was Being with Jesus, Becoming like Jesus, and Doing what Jesus did. In our next study we talked about Jesus healing work of forgiveness of sin being at work in our lives and extending to those around us. Last week we talked about Jesus our Savior and how as Followers of Jesus it means that we will be out looking for lost people...So then, as we consider Jesus the Servant that means that we also are being

called to serve people - this is our posture, to serve others, whatever the need or situation...

3. However, I think to practice foot washing at our gatherings, though it might bring a great visual to Jesus act, and stir up our hearts in a unique way, would be to miss the point of what Jesus is doing. Jesus picked one of the most culturally degrading, humble acts to show us how we are to live our lives - foot washing. It is then not an action to follow (meaning literal foot washing) but a continual posture of God's people.
4. The point is that God's people, disciples of Jesus, are people that proactively go low. Disciples of Jesus seek out opportunities to make themselves the servant of others.
 1. What might this look like in our everyday lives? Listening in conversation; good hospitality with visitors, guests and even door to door solicitors; good attention to customers, clients, students, and colleagues in business and work; good presence and servant posture with spouse and children. "Being at your service", as a whole way of life. These and hundreds of other daily responsibilities and opportunities are beautifully pictured by Jesus' foot washing. Foot washing teaches both the Christian Gospel and the Christian ethic. In following Jesus, we put the life of Jesus on Display for the world to see and to receive..
 1. Paul put's it this way... **"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.." - Philippians 2:3-7**
 2. "Jesus' foot washing is not only a perfect depiction of what God has done for us in Jesus atoning work and what God continues to do for us by applying his Son's atoning work to us through Word, Sacraments, Church and Prayer, It also shows disciples how they can live their lives in the most

blessed possible way: in mutual service, submission, forgiveness, and patience.” - F.D. Bruner, The Gospel of John

4. **Conclusion:** Jesus serves us out of a place of total and complete assurance of his place and identity with the Father... assured of the Father's love and pleasure on him... All power had been given to him, he had come from God, was going back to God. His mission was complete.. so he steps down to serve.
 1. In verse 34, Jesus says, “ **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**”
 2. Fredrick Bruner says that the word “as” is not only comparative but also causative. Meaning that Jesus is saying love and serve one another, “Out of the Love, or from the resources of the love that I have for you.”
 3. So we are to humble ourselves and serve one another out of a place of recognition of what Jesus has done for us. Out of an assurance in the great love that the Father has for us.
 1. Jesus went low so we could be lifted high in glory with Him, he became poor that we might be rich in blessing, he was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him..... We are now also to go low, but it is only out of an assurance of who we are (because of what Christ has done) where we are going, and the power and authority we have in Christ... the promise of what is to come... This is the mindset that we are to have.
 2. Christian service, Christian love is only “Christian” when it is a response to Christ work, and out of a place of confidence of who we are and where we are headed because of Christ love for us displayed in him laying down his life..... Christian love and service is only to be done in the power of Christ, though his Spirit’s compelling work in us.
 4. This isn’t only about the way that we receive Jesus’ act, it isn’t only about the way that we follow his example but it is also, on top of all that, the most sure and powerful way that we show the gospel to a watching, perishing world... a world that longs to know the affection

and love of a God who will love them to the end. Spirit help us follow Jesus our teacher in this way.