

## Introduction

1. “How can a man be happy when he has to serve someone?” These were the words of the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, words we might resonate with. Serving others can feel like a chore sometimes, and in our hearts we are tempted to think that being served is the key to happiness - But the truth is, we all serve somebody or something. As the great theologian Bob Dylan, “You’re gonna have to serve somebody, you’re gonna have to serve somebody, it may be the Devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”
2. This topic of service is what we want to think about this morning, but in this text the key servant is not a disciple, a man, a woman, a child, or a slave, but the key servant is God himself. God himself is on display as the one who shows divine hospitality to his people! There are three movements in this text I want to look at with you, but first we need to consider the context of this scene.

## Context: “When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart”

1. John ch. 13 marks a significant transition in John’s gospel account. Ch.1-12 “book of the signs” signs that display the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. But from ch. 12- end of gospel “book of glory” – Christ reveals his glory intimately, and personally to his disciples who were his friends. Here we are told that the hour of Christ has come, what is this hour? In John 2 we are told that the wine had run out and Mary told Jesus of the problem, and he responded “Woman, what does this have to do with me, my hour has not yet come.”
2. This hour referred to throughout John’s gospel refers to the hour of Christ’s sufferings on the cross and his departure out of this world. Here, as he sees the dark storm clouds coming in, we are told that he loved his disciples to the end.
3. In these final hours of his life, he is sharing a meal with the disciples, reclining at table – left arm at the table, and feet reclining behind him.

## God’s power on display in an unexpected way (READ 2-3)

1. Pause here – what should we expect the next words to read? Pretend you don’t know the story – here is Jesus, with full knowledge of his power, authority, and position as God’s Son, and knowledge that he is going back to the Father. He is conscious of the occasion that he is at the climactic part of history, fulfilling God’s ancient promises given to Adam, Abraham, Isaac Jacob – he has come as the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent, and to gather his people from the nations. Here he sees right in front of him Satan’s schemes unfolding, as he stares at Judas Iscariot – a false who will betray him – so what would we think would be Jesus next move? We might expect Jesus to dive across the table and destroy Judas. We would expect him to exercise his authority by waging war against the devil! That is the way power looks in our world! But what do we read... (READ v.4-5)....
2. We do not see Jesus assert his authority as Lord, but instead he leaves the head of the table where he belongs, he takes on the form of a servant, and stoops down to wash the feet of these sinners, even the feet of his enemy (Judas Iscariot). Here, the all powerful God, creator and sustainer of the universe, is here on his knees. Beloved, this is true power displayed!

### *Why should this shock us? Why is this unexpected?*

3. BACKGROUND: Well, washing feet before a meal was an ordinary part of life – people wore sandals and would be walking around all day on dusty roads, so throughout the day when you sat down for a meal, you washed your feet. It was an act of hospitality to provide water for your guests if they came for a meal, but you would not wash their feet, they would wash their own feet. There were occasions when servants would wash peoples feet, but even these servants could not be Jewish, but they had to be gentile slaves.
4. Moreover, superiors did NOT do acts of service for inferiors, especially not washing their feet! In fact, scholars say, “there is no instance in either Jewish or Greco-Roman sources of a superior washing the feet of an inferior.” It was the disciples of rabbis who would do acts of service for their teacher, but not even they would not be expected to do the foot-washing.
5. So this act of service that Jesus takes upon himself is utterly radical, unheard of and unexpected.
6. It is as if the Prime Minister of Canada invited you over for a meal, and when you got to the table you saw him come into the room wearing apron, and in one hand he had a towel, and in the other a bucket of water. Imagine him coming to your seat, kneeling down to take off your shoes, and he begins to wash your feet. Imagine that! You would be embarrassed, you would feel awkward and probably very uncomfortable!
  - a. You just don’t do that sort of thing; it goes against the social norms! But this is what Jesus is doing, God in human flesh. A man far superior to the Prime Minister.
  - b. The power and love of God is expressed not in act of glory, but in an act of humiliation – foot-washing.

1<sup>st</sup> thing we need to take away from this text is that we worship a God who serves his people, we worship a God who uses his power to serve! This should shock us! This is the opposite of what you see in the world other world religions.

1. STORY: When I was in seminary our evangelism and missions class went to a Hindu temple, and there we saw devout men, women, and children bringing food offerings to various gods that were visibly displayed there.
  - a. You go down the list, and each religion has its own form of service leading to salvation, or right standing before God. Only in Christianity do we meet a God who serves his people.
    - i. Remember Paul's words to the Athenians as he looked out from Mars hill upon the various idols of his day, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24-25).
  - b. In Christianity, you need to be served by the Living God before you can serve others, or you will fall into thinking that your service somehow attains or retains God favor.
    - i. The moralist thinks their service puts God in debt to them, "you owe me." Older Son in the prodigal Son story! But this is not true, God does not owe us anything b/c of our service. Rather, we owe God because of our sins, and we need washing.

### Salvation Symbolized (v.6-7).

1. "Lord, are you washing my feet?" – this question isn't said with a sense of gratitude and humility, but with indignation – Greek: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" "You better not!" "This is crazy, Jesus, masters and Lord's don't do these things, it is for gentile servant girls!" It is as if Peter puts out his arms and pushes Jesus back a little. "No, no, no. Not my feet."
  - a. His eyes are horizontally focused, only on what is socially fitting. Only wanting a Messiah in a form he thinks is best – one who is powerful, glorious!
  - b. Again, Peter's response was natural since superiors did not wash the feet of inferiors, and this act no doubt caught him off guard. This form of a Messiah not expected.
  - c. Jesus radically went against the social conventions of the day just as he did when he blessed children, ate with sinners, and spent time with outcast.
  - d. "What I am doing now you don't understand, but you will understand later," Oh, how often our Lord has to say this to us – what I am doing in your life now, you don't understand, but you will understand later.
2. But Peter goes even further than an indignant question and boldly says, "You shall never wash my feet!" Literally: "Never to eternity" "not in a million years!"
  - a. Peter rejects the service of Jesus, especially a messiah in this form! One commentator has said, "Peter's stance reflects the basic way men think, the refusal to see the act of salvation in what is lowly, or God in the form of a slave." (Bultman).
  - b. The heart of sinners naturally adopts the position pride – "I don't need your washing" – "I can wash myself." OR, "no way I am going to receive THIS kinds of savior."
  - c. But Jesus says to that person what he said to Peter...
3. Jesus graciously responds with "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me."
  - a. Not only was he saying that Peter cannot share a meal with him, but that he ultimately cannot share in the eternal feast prepared in heaven. Christ's service was not merely for a meal on earth, but it was symbolic for the washing we need for the heavenly banquet God has prepared for us!
  - b. In other words, to be washed is necessary if you want to have table fellowship with Jesus.
  - c. The washing of the disciples' feet is a picture of the gospel, and how God provides the necessary cleansing for his people to have communion with him.
  - d. After Jesus speaks of the necessity of being washed, Peter sees something greater through the sign of foot-washing! He understands in some imperfect way, that this washing means that he has a communion with Jesus, and that he can be with him. Jesus is displaying the gospel in this act. So he says, "Not only my feet, but also my hands and my head! In other words, Give me a bath, Jesus! Make sure I am completely clean! This is the heart of a sinner who knows their dirty, and knows they need cleansing from Sin! READ 10-12
4. \*\*\*This whole act of foot-washing is a picture of our salvation, a living parable for his disciples to see! This act tells the story of what our Lord has done not only for these disciples, but also for us. For us, Christ ultimately laid aside his garments when he came down from heaven, and he took on the role of a servant for our sakes. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many! He took on the form of a servant, and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. His ultimate act of humiliation was not seen here as he washed the disciples' feet like a gentile slave, but his ultimate humiliation was at the cross, where he was stripped of all his garments and crucified as a criminal! There, beloved, his own blood was poured out like water wash away your sins! His own blood was the means provided by God to cleanse our dirty hearts! In believing in this lowly act of salvation, which is foolish in the world's eyes, we receive the power of God unto salvation!

- a. NOW, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins, and sinners plunge beneath that flood and lose all their guilty stains!”
  - b. No matter how dirty you feel today, or how many stains are upon your life, “if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness!” (1 Jn 1:8). Amen!
  - c. 1 Cor. 6:9-10, Apart from Jesus you may have been an adulterer, a gossip, a thief, a fornicator, and person filled with pride and anger and lust, But Paul says “you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”
5. After washing away our sins away on the cross, the Son of God took up his garments of glory once again when he was raised from the dead, and sat down at the right hand of his Father on High!
    - a. And he says to you what he said to his disciples after that meal, “Do you know what I have done to you?” (v.12). “Do you see how I have washed you?”
  6. Brothers and sisters, each Lord’s Day, God gathers us in his presence to wash our feet! Yes, he delights in our prayers, yes he desires our heartfelt service to one another, but he does not need our service in the way that we need His! We come this morning primarily to receive His service to us through these ordinary means of grace, and we say with Peter in Faith – Wash me Lord, my hands, and my head, and my feet!
  7. When our hearts grasp more deeply what Christ has done for us, when we can answer Jesus question, “Yes, I see what you have done for me,” then we begin to delight in serving others. v.13-17

### **Conclusion: Our Response of Service**

1. As Christians we know we are supposed to be virtuous, but we tend toward those virtues that are praised in the world’s eyes. In Jesus day the culture treasured virtues like courage, honor, or military power. We are like James and John, asking Jesus if we can sit at his right hand in glory! But here Jesus is giving us not a theology of glory, but a theology of the cross – showing us the way of humility, self sacrifice, and true love for our brothers. What does this look like???
  - a. On Monday I told my wife about this text – comforting and convicting as I was reminded that there ‘no task low for the Christian to do’, so she responded “told me to vacuum the stairs!”
  - b. It means that in the areas of authority God has set up, we are to think of those areas in terms of service.
    - i. In the world the people use their authority and status to get people to serve them, but Jesus says not so in my kingdom. If you are in a position of power, you are to imitate Jesus in using your power to serve others.
    - ii. The apostles understood this, and even thought of their ministry in terms of service. You remember that when divisions broke out in the church of Corinth, with members following their favorite super apostles, Paul responded... 1 Cor. 2
    - iii. Leaders in the church today are to think of themselves as foot-washers, servants of the flock, not Lords.
    - iv. Husbands and Fathers are to see themselves as foot-washers, servants to their family.
      1. Wash wife with the water of the word.
    - v. For all of us, we remember that there is no task too low for the Christian. Peter finally understood this as he wrote to the church, “Peter – “Clothe yourselves in humility.”
    - vi. If we say, “Oh, I could not do that task, do you know who I am,” we show we really don’t understand the gospel. For the Son of God himself took upon the form of a servant, and washed the feet of sinners, and we are to follow in his example of humility and self-denial.
2. If you know these things, Jesus says, blessed are you if you do them.
  - a. We all have to serve somebody, but to serve the King who has ultimately served us in Christ is a joyous task! For his commandments are not burdensome for us, because they come to us from the cleansing hands of Christ that were pierced to wash away our sins. May God empower us to serve one another and our neighbor with hearts filled with the joy of the gospel. Amen.