

The Servant King

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[0:00] Amen. Well, I'm sure we all know the significance of the last words of a person. I discovered recently on Netflix that there's a documentary series called Famous Last Words.

And it's kind of unusual because the show consists of a series of interviews with famous people. And so they were filmed before they died.

And then the interview of their conversation is aired immediately afterwards. And so these posthumously broadcast conversations enable the person who knows that they're going to die to express themselves and to give their final message to their loved ones.

And I watched a brief clip of it. And what they say is basically it's intimate, it is important, and it's instructive, as you would imagine, for those that they leave behind and want to communicate a message to.

Now, today as we come to the Gospel of John, reading from chapter 13, which begins a short series in John, John chapters 13 to 17, we come to a section that is known as the Farewell Discourse.

[1:10] Farewell Discourse because Jesus is saying farewell to his disciples before he dies. And it is a farewell discourse. And these are Jesus' famous last words because what he does is the night before he dies, he spends the evening with his disciples and he speaks to them.

And the setting for this conversation is in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem. But that very night, Jesus would be betrayed and he would be arrested.

And then the following day, Jesus would be crucified. And so it's an evening that is full of significance as Jesus prepares his disciples for his death.

And so we can listen to Jesus as he teaches them and as he prays to his Father. And what Jesus says is intimate, it is important, and it is instructive.

And so we are given what the Puritan Thomas Goodwin called a window into Christ's heart. We're shown Jesus. We're shown how he feels about his disciples.

[2:21] We're told what he will do. We discover Jesus' heart for his disciples, but also his heart for us. And so we can watch his actions. We can listen to his teaching.

We can hear Jesus praying. And so today, what we're going to focus on is this display of Jesus' love as he washes his disciples' feet. And it's an act that is symbolic of the work that Jesus would do.

And it has implications, of course, for us because it gives us a pattern for us to follow. And so our three points this afternoon are quite simply a display of Jesus' love, a symbol of Jesus' work, and a pattern for Jesus' people.

Those words, those headings are up on the screen. So first of all, a display of Jesus' love. This is verse 1 to 3. It's obvious Jesus washing his disciples' feet one last time is a display of his love for them.

So verse 1 tells us, It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world.

[3:27] He loved them to the end. Now, last week, remember, we mentioned that in John's gospel, it's kind of divided into two parts. So first of all, there is the book of signs, chapters 1 to 12.

There are these seven signs that point to Jesus being the Messiah and the Son of God. And then the second half of John's gospel, chapters 13 to 21, it's been called the book of glory, book of signs, and then the book of glory.

Because in the book of glory, Jesus increasingly reveals his glory as the focus turns towards his death and his resurrection. And so now everything that Jesus does and says moves towards his death.

And it's interesting that the final night before Jesus dies gives us basically half the content of the gospel of John. And so we're told here in verse 1, Jesus loved his disciples to the end.

And the love is displayed in action as he washes their feet. But it points to an even greater act of love, which helps explain why Jesus died on the cross.

[4:38] And we pick this up from the context here. So we read that this happened just before the Passover festival. If you know your Bible, you know that the Passover was celebrated every year as a reminder of God's rescue of his people from the Exodus, their Exodus in Egypt.

The Passover lamb was sacrificed so that the judgment of God could pass over the people. And now here is Jesus about to fulfill the Passover. He is the lamb who would be sacrificed for the sins of his people.

So the judgment of God would pass over them. And Jesus, we read, knew the hour, knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

So the hour refers to his death. But it's clear that Jesus is in complete control as he moves towards it. Because he came from God the Father with a work to do in this world, a mission, his death and his resurrection.

And then he would go back to the Father. And now is the time for him to complete that work, as it were. And yet despite his power and despite his control of everything, what does Jesus do?

[5:59] Last night on earth, he gets down with a towel and he washes his disciples' feet. This humble act of service anticipates what he would do as he died on the cross for them.

And it sets the stage for Jesus' final words to them, even though Judas would betray him. So verse 2 tells us the evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

And Jesus knew this was coming, that Judas would betray him. But John here wants us to see beyond the mere human activity on that night. Because there's a far bigger perspective to see. Because behind Judas, the devil is at work in opposition to God and to his Messiah. And so what's going on here is part of this cosmic battle between God and Satan, his enemy.

And so we should never think that events are out of control here. Or that Jesus' death was somehow a tragic accident. No, we're reminded that Jesus was working out the Father's plan.

[7:12] Verse 3, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So the Father had put everything into Jesus' hands.

And so here is Jesus accomplishing God's great salvation plan for the world. And the foot washing is a display of Jesus' love for his disciples.

But it's also pointing to a greater display of Jesus' love, not just for the disciples, but for the world. It is as Jesus would soon say to them in John chapter 13, sorry, chapter 15, verse 13.

Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. And so please, just as we apply this first point, don't miss this display of love.

It's here, vividly presented to us so that we would know the love that Jesus has for us. Don't doubt that Jesus loves you.

[8:25] Don't miss this. Don't leave here today and walk out the door and go home without knowing that Jesus loves you. Jesus came into this world for you.

And so it doesn't matter what your background has been or where you've come from or what you've done. Jesus loves you. That's why he came.

Don't miss this. It would be like walking around the Kelvin Grove Museum and Gallery and failing to see Glasgow's most famous painting. You know what painting that is, don't you?

Salvador Dali's Christ of St. John on the Cross. Some friends came to stay with us to Glasgow and they said, what should we do? I said, Glasgow's a great city, plenty to do. Just wear a rain jacket, take an umbrella, and there's plenty to see.

And so they went to Kelvin Grove Museum and Gallery because I recommended it. And I said, you've got to see. It was on the first floor, but now it's on the ground floor. You've got to see the Salvador Dali painting of Jesus Christ on the cross.

[9:30] It's about seven feet tall. Can't miss it. Don't miss it. See it. And they came back home soaked after a nice wet day, traipsing around Glasgow.

I said, did you see the painting? And he said, oh, no, no, we missed it. There were lots of other good paintings, but we didn't see that one. And yet, sadly, I think that's what many people do when it comes to Jesus.

I was so used to just assuming or thinking, yeah, Jesus loves me. God loves everybody, of course. But they fail to see what that really means. That Jesus reveals his great love for sinners like you and me.

He reveals it through this act of washing his disciples' feet, and he reveals it at the cross. And yet, so many people miss the significance of Jesus' love for them.

And they think, surely, he doesn't love somebody like me. Jonathan, you're the minister. You don't know what I've done. Jesus would turn away from me rather than love me.

[10:37] Not so. It's a display of Jesus' love. Second point is it's a symbol of Jesus' work in verse 4 to 11. So it is a display of Jesus' love, but it is also a symbol of Jesus' saving work.

In a sense, it prefigures his death on the cross. Well, how? Well, just look at how this unfolds in verse 4 and 5. So he got up from the meal. They were all sitting down.

He got up. He took off his outer clothing. He wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin. He began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with a towel that was wrapped around him.

So what Jesus is doing here is a bit like an acted-out parable. A parable of the gospel or the whole Bible story even. Because there's more to this foot-washing exercise than just simply these guys had absolutely stinking feet.

And Jesus says, the smell in here is awful. I'm going to do something about it. There's more to it than that. By washing their feet, he's showing who he is and what he came to do.

[11:46] So he is the Son of God, God the Son, who came from God the Father to take this role of a servant, to humble himself by dying on a cross.

And then he would be exalted to the highest place as he returned to God the Father. And so the practical work of foot-washing basically acts out the saving work that Jesus would do on the cross. It's what the Apostle Paul teaches in Philippians. Remember in Philippians 2, verse 6-9, he says these words about Jesus. Philippians 2, from verse 6.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, he says, He says, It's interesting when you read John chapter 13 and then you read those words from Paul in Philippians chapter 2, you can't unsee them.

You can't unsee the connection. Like yesterday, I met somebody who was the brother of somebody I knew. And I didn't know this was his brother. And somebody said, look at him. Whose brother is he?

[13:19] And I couldn't figure it out at the beginning. But then I recognized, oh, that's who your brother is. You're just like him. When you see it, you can't then unsee it.

And it's the same here when we read Philippians 2 and read about the work of Jesus. Sinclair Ferguson, the theologian, says, Point by point, Jesus is acting out symbolically what Paul describes theologically.

How he came from the highest glory of heaven into the depths of her human condition, took the form of a slave, and accomplished her cleansing from sin by his death on the cross, and then was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

So just look down again here at what Jesus does in that upper room. So Jesus is the host. This is verse 4. He's the host of the meal. But he gets up.

He leaves the place of honor as a host. And he takes on the role of a servant. And Paul says, being in very nature God, he emptied himself, taking the very nature of a servant.

[14:22] And then in John 13, what does Jesus do? Well, he takes off his outer clothing, and he wraps a towel around his waist. He then pours water into a basin, and he washes his disciples' feet. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And then when Jesus is done, what does he do? Verse 12 says he puts his clothes on and returns to his place. Paul says, therefore God exalted him to the highest place.

So that's the backdrop to this foot washing. It's describing the work that Jesus would come to do. Think of it like a U-shape. He's with God the Father for all eternity. He comes down to earth, humbles himself as a servant.

He suffers and dies. He's resurrected, and then he's exalted, and goes back to God the Father. So Jesus is Lord. And one day, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

But here he is washing feet. And of course, Peter hasn't fully grasped all of this yet. He's still horrified at the thought of Jesus washing his feet. Verse 6, Now foot washing was the most menial

of tasks for slaves.

[15 : 47] It was a job for servants. Back then, the streets would have been full of animals. Shoes, if they were worn at all, would have been open sandals. And so people's feet would have been pretty dirty.

And yet Jesus humbles himself to wash his disciples' feet. Now, the disciples clearly knew this job was beneath them.

Because none of them had bothered to do this. And yet the Lord Jesus does what the lowest of the low would do. Jesus is the servant.

Which is what the Bible tells us about Jesus in the prophet Isaiah chapter 52 and chapter 53. He is the suffering servant who is promised, who would come and suffer and die for his people.

And Peter doesn't see this yet. And so it's understandable that he objects to Jesus' action. He hasn't grasped what it all symbolizes. So verse 7, Jesus replied, You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

[16 : 53] He would come to understand the significance of Jesus washing his feet. Because the foot washing is symbolic of Jesus washing away our sin at the cross.

So verse 8, No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. So Peter would come to realize that he can't have any part with Jesus if Jesus doesn't wash away his sins.

Jesus is saying that being washed is necessary. That's why this foot washing symbolizes our need to be cleansed from our sin.

Because without it, neither Peter nor anyone else can share in the salvation that Jesus came to give. And so for Peter, he's thinking, If that's the case, why just stop with feet?

Verse 9, Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. He goes from one extreme to the other, but he still doesn't understand. Jesus answered in verse 10, Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet.

[18 : 06] Their whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you. So Jesus is saying to Peter that he has already been made clean. What does he mean?

Well, Peter believed in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. So he has had a bath, as it were. His sins have been forgiven. So he is clean. But he still needs cleansing as he continues to follow Jesus.

And Jesus adds that his disciples are clean, though not every one of you. He's referring to Judas there in verse 11, For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, Not every one of you was clean.

He's not clean because he's working with the devil. And so can you see how everything here is moving towards Jesus' death? From the foot washing of the disciples to the betrayal of Judas, the reality is that Jesus had to die so that we can be washed clean of our sin.

And we all need this once-for-all washing if we are to be acceptable to God. When we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus, we are forgiven.

[19 : 27] We're clean, to use Jesus' words. But we're well aware, even when we're clean, that we still all continue to sin as we try to follow Jesus.

And that's why we need this continual forgiveness for the sins we keep committing. We need this daily cleansing to become all that Jesus wants us to be.

And so the foot washing is a symbol of Jesus' work and how he washes away our sin. He's teaching in a vivid way what his death on the cross achieves for us.

Okay, so a display of Jesus' love, a symbol of Jesus' work, but it is also a pattern for Jesus' people. Jesus asks his disciples there in verse 12, Do you understand what I have done for you?

Do they understand Jesus' display of love and washing their feet is a symbol of his work on the cross for them? So Jesus is their savior, but Jesus is also their example.

[20 : 38] Where what Jesus has just done serves as the pattern for what they must do. Humble service.

So this is this acted parable that transfers into how they should live their lives. It has implications for them, but also obviously implications for us.

Jesus has set this example to be emulated. And that's why he's saying, verse 13 and 14, You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. So if this is what the teacher does, what the Lord does, and it's astonishing that he does it, then his disciples should be ready and willing to do no less.

If Jesus has served them in this way, then they've got to serve others in the same way, because disciples should imitate their master. So verse 15, I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

[21 : 50] Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Jesus has set an example of what we should do.

And so we should never think that foot washing, or any other form of service, is beneath us. Now, I don't think Jesus wants us to start washing everybody's feet.

So just keep your shoes on, keep your socks on, nobody needs to see your feet. Jesus didn't display his love in this way, so that we would have foot washing ceremonies, every time we come to church, until he returns.

No. I guess we shouldn't think of it like the Lord's Supper, which is something Jesus has said we should do until he returns. No, the foot washing isn't some kind of permanent right.

Jesus gives a pattern for his people, teaching us to follow his example. And what's his example? Well, it's an example of humble and loving service.

[22 : 54] So it might not be foot washing, but there will be other concrete acts of service that we can humbly do for others. As part of my role as a football chaplain at the football club, I coordinate a hospitality suite for the players' families, mums, dads, grannies, grandpads, children, girlfriends, and so on.

And on game days, the families all come, and we sit down and we chat and have a great time, especially when the team win. And earlier in the season, the catering staff forgot to put the milk beside the tea and coffee and refreshments on the table.

And I don't take milk in my tea or coffee, so it doesn't bother me, really, if there's no milk. But somebody, one of the family members, came up to me and said, there's no milk.

Where's the milk? And I was about to say, that's not my job. How about you go downstairs and get some yourself? But I bit my tongue, and I realized, well, I should get up from my seat and go downstairs and get the milk and bring it up for everybody.

And I think my initial attitude as I thought about how I would respond was basically, I've got far more important responsibilities here than to go and get the milk from the fridge.

[24 : 21] Somebody else should humble themselves and perform that task, but not me. And yet, can we see here that Jesus serving his disciples puts us to shame, doesn't it?

Especially when we think some tasks are beneath me. Therefore, somebody else, I've got better stuff to do, so that shouldn't be my job or my role.

I think we're always going to be in situations where we will have to decide, we'll have to choose whether we will follow Jesus' example or not. Especially if we feel certain people don't deserve our time or effort.

We might think, it's not my role to serve them. And so here's the question, how can we obey Jesus? How can we obey Jesus? Well, it doesn't just happen by trying harder.

Like today, you could say, okay, that was an okay sermon. I'm going to go. First opportunity I see to serve someone, I'm going to serve that person, try harder.

[25 : 30] But it doesn't work because there's tomorrow, there's the next day, there's the next day. How can we keep it going? Well, we just can't. According to Jesus, it happens as we gain a better understanding of what he has done for us.

Remember the question, verse 12, do you understand what I have done for you? Foot washing and death. So as we better understand the gospel of Jesus Christ in our hearts and in our heads, then it can't fail to transform our lives.

Only as I realize my desperate need for Jesus to wash me clean of my sin, because I can do nothing to accomplish or earn my salvation myself, only then when I realize this will I be humbled to know I'm no better than anyone else.

And so I am no more deserving of Jesus' love than anyone else. Because if the Son of God had to die for me, and yet he was willing to die for me, it says I understand how he humbled himself to die for me, then I'll be able to humble myself to sacrificially serve others.

And it's a real challenge, isn't it? It doesn't come naturally to any one of us, but it's what Jesus calls us to do. So verse 17, Jesus says there, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

[27 : 06] And so we all know what Jesus wants us to do, don't we? We know the kind of service he wants us to give to others.

But knowing doesn't necessarily make a difference to living, does it? And so the questions for us are, well, do I serve others?

But not only do I, how much do I serve? And also, well, who am I serving? Because we are blessed by doing, not just by knowing.

Blessing comes through service. And I'm sure we've experienced this. But we don't experience this before we serve, we only experience it after we serve.

Serving others isn't easy. It requires time and effort. It can be costly and demanding. It is often thankless and it is unnoticed. But if we fail to do it, we actually miss out on the blessing.

[28 : 10] blessing. And yet, as we serve others in Christ's name, we experience Christ's blessing. Even when we serve those, and especially when we serve those we don't think deserve our service, even when we serve them, then we find that we become more Christ-like.

And there are no exceptions to those we ought to serve. Think of the upper room. Judas didn't deserve to be served by Jesus, did he?

Peter was about to betray Jesus. He didn't deserve to be served by Jesus. None of the disciples did and none of us do either. And yet, Jesus, the Lord, could not have served us more or served us better.

And so, when did you last serve others for Jesus' sake? Because it's in serving others when there's no merit or gain from it, like the way that Jesus has served us.

That's what makes us more like Jesus. And so, Jesus wants us to become more like him. That's what it means to be a disciple. And so, can you see why if you are unwilling or unprepared to serve others, you lose those opportunities to become more like Jesus.

[29 : 40] So, serving the refreshments in church, baking for somebody, visiting somebody, doing something for somebody that does nothing for you is an opportunity to become more like Jesus.

And that's how the blessing comes. That's what Jesus is saying here. serving others, serving anyone other than ourselves is so countercultural, isn't it?

It's unusual. It's abnormal in our world today. Everybody is just out for themselves and for what they can gain. But if our Lord washed feet and gave his life for us, then who are we to think that we don't need to serve anyone else.

And so, the message as we close is primarily, let Jesus wash you. We are all filthy because of our sin.

And we will always be filthy until Jesus makes us clean. And here is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus wants to make you clean.

[30 : 54] He came into this world to die on a cross for you to cleanse your heart and wash away your sin no matter what you've done.

Jesus loved us so much that he was willing as he died on the cross to take all of our filth, all of our sin, all of the evil of the world upon himself on the cross so we could be washed clean.

And he's saying here we can have no part with him unless he washes us clean. Well how does it happen? It happens as we repent of our sin and believe in him.

And then when we're clean, well he is our lord and our master and our teacher so we will want to obey him by following the example that he has set. even if it means picking up a towel and washing somebody else's feet or just serving them in whatever way that we can because when we understand how the Lord Jesus served us out of gratitude in our hearts we will want to serve him knowing this means serving others.

As his love changes us, as we discover how much he loves us and all that he has done for us, his love enables us to love other people in his name and to serve others for his sake.