

John - Part 43 - Sermon Manuscript - Becoming Servants

If you didn't know already, my family can be pretty competitive!

My son and I sort of have this ongoing competition of who's the best at Mario Kart. When he first got it, I'd beat him almost every time. But eventually he got really good, and now our races are always a nail biter.

But we're always making comments back and forth about who's going to win - who's the best. To be fair, these days Alex wins most of the time. I guess my gaming reflexes are getting slower with age.

But I still like to challenge him! So the other night I challenged him to some Mario Kart. And after he beat me 5 out of 6 races he said something like, "I don't know why we play this game anymore... You're just going to lose anyway!"

There will come a day when we sit down to play Mario Kart, I will be the one to teach my son that pride comes before the fall! ...His gloating will cease, and I'm sure mine will increase!

This kind of competitive arguing over who's the greatest seems to be in our human nature. Even the disciples argued this way!

Case in point: In Luke chapter 9, Jesus did some amazing things...

He fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish. He met with Moses and Elijah on a mountain. And while He met with them, His face changed and His clothes became as bright as lightning. Then the next day, He cast out a demon from a little boy!

Everyone, including His disciples, was astonished at what Jesus could do! They were in awe of His power... but His power ended up causing an argument among His disciples.

Luke says in 9:46 - "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest."

Now... *Why* would they be arguing over who would be the greatest?

They're witnessing all that Jesus could do. For example - As I already mentioned, it wasn't that long ago that He fed the thousands. And if you remember when we covered that passage, we learned that John's account says that the people there actually wanted to force Jesus to be their King!

That idea was still in the air... and it's now crept into the disciples' hearts. They're thinking Jesus was powerful enough to be their King that would lead the Jews to victory over the Roman Empire!

They're thinking that if Jesus is King, surely He'd give His disciples a prominent position in His Kingdom!? So, in Luke 9, when they're arguing about who would be the greatest, they're arguing over who would be second in command.

So that's Luke 9. Fast forward to Luke 22 and we find that they're *still* arguing over the same thing! This time they're in an upper room, eating their final meal together - the meal that we call the Last Supper.

It was a Thursday night... The same night Jesus would be arrested and then crucified the next day.

Luke 22:24-25 - A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors.

Notice the word Benefactors is capitalized.

[Blank] I wasn't exactly sure what this meant so I was surprised that when I looked it up, this is the only time this word is used in the New Testament.

However it was used outside the New Testament in places like the Greek version of our Old Testament, and other writings of the time. So we know that...

“Benefactor is an honorary title given to a person who has done service to their country ... especially with financial help.”¹

Imagine Gentile Kings ... Kings of non-Jewish people... and these Kings are helping out their Gentile subjects financially. But their help comes at a price.

Sure, the King will help you get out of your financial jam, but when he does, you're now under his control - He is your master - you do what he says, or else!

That's the kind of example that people had in their Kings. But Jesus isn't that kind of King. He says...

Luke 22:26 - But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

The one who rules - the King - should be like the one who serves. That's not at all how the disciples thought of Jesus as their King...

They're still thinking that Jesus would be their King that would lead them to victory over the Roman Empire. But to their surprise, Jesus was about to turn that idea upside down...

Keep all this in mind and turn with me to today's passage in John 13.

John 13:1-17 describes an event that happened during the Last Supper. John's account doesn't include the meal - maybe because Matthew, Mark, and Luke already did. But John includes something that happened at that meal that none of the other gospels included...

Footwashing!

Now, I have to say... I grew up going to church, but I don't recall a time when someone washed my feet at church. That just wasn't normal.

¹ Logos Bible Software

Years ago it was definitely more normal than today. Back in the late 18th century when our denomination started, foot washing would often happen during communion services - which makes sense because Jesus washed His disciples feet during the night of the Last Supper.

But as churches grew, foot washing became more of a separate service. Some churches still practice it today, usually during Maundy Thursday evening services. And the reason for doing it on the Thursday of Easter week is because of what happens in John 13...

So, let's read the scene that unfolds...

John 13:1-17 - 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, he loved them to the end.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and **the devil** had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

So far, this is only the second time in John's gospel that the devil is mentioned. I think it's interesting that right away in chapter one Jesus is identified as the Light, but John hasn't yet told us who the darkness represents.

But here we have our first clue... the setting is night time, and now the devil is mentioned. So now when we go back and read John 3, suddenly things are more clear when he says, "Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."

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;

Remember John chapter 1? *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made... In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it!*

4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "**you shall never** wash my feet."

There's a double negative there in the Greek... Today Peter might say it like, "I would never, ever, allow you to wash my feet. Not in a million years. Not *ever*."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.** 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

[Blank] Okay, so when it comes to foot washing, there's a few things that are helpful to know...

First, this was a totally normal thing in their society to do. Everyone walked the dusty streets in their sandals, and when you came into a home, there would be a

bowl with a pitcher of water so that your feet could be washed - it was a form of hospitality.

But not just anybody washed feet. The men certainly weren't going to do it. But even the women and children weren't allowed to wash their feet. That job was left to the servants of the house.

But when the disciples were in the upper room, they're not in anyone's home - they're pretty much renting the space for the night to have a big meal.

Now usually when you enter the room you would get your feet washed because you just came off the street. But that's not how John describes it. He says that the meal was already in progress. And when Jesus got up from the meal, that's when He started prepping to wash their feet.

So I'm thinking... *Why?* Why wait until after the meal was over? What reason would Jesus have to wash their feet just before they went back outside?

There could be a few reasons: Maybe He wanted to do it when they first got there but then forgot? I doubt that. Maybe He simply wanted to teach them a lesson in humility? That's possible, but I think there's more to it...

Remember the argument that happened as they were eating their meal?

I can't prove this, but I suspect the argument over who would be the greatest among the disciples was what prompted Jesus to do something radical.

In verse 4 the NIV version says that Jesus got up from the meal and took off his outer clothing. We might think of His outer clothing as sort of like a robe, or maybe a long coat...

But the interesting thing is that in verse 4, the Greek word behind "outer clothing" is **plural**. That's why some translations say that Jesus laid aside his "garments" - plural.

And because the word is plural, scholars think this most likely means that Jesus didn't just take off his jacket...

Jesus stripped down to the clothing of a servant - Basically, His underwear! Then He wrapped a towel around His waist - and that wasn't really for the sake of being modest. He was going to use the towel to dry off His disciples feet.

So as He's washing and drying the feet of the disciples, Peter is standing back just watching all of this happen. He can't believe his eyes! Jesus is stooping down to the level of a servant!! That's just unthinkable!

Jesus was to be their *King*, not their *servant*! After all, **what King would bring Himself down to the level of a servant?!**

And that's what Peter didn't understand...

Peter and the disciples wanted a high status in the new Kingdom that they thought Jesus was going to set up. They wanted recognition and prestige. But if they kept thinking like this, **their pride would be their downfall.**

So, Jesus decided to teach them a lesson...

And what a lesson! I imagine they were all just absolutely shocked to see Jesus, their King, taking on the role of a servant. But as one commentator put it...

"It was crucial for his followers to learn that whoever wanted to be great must become a servant, and whoever wanted to be first must be slave of all (Mk 10:43-44). [In fact,] The only kind of leadership Jesus taught was servant-leadership."²

Jesus was providing for them an example of how they should live. If they want to follow Him, then they need to learn the value of serving others because that kind of service is what reflects the heart of God.

² Mounce, Robert H. "John." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke-Acts (Revised Edition)*. Ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Vol. 10. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007. 549. Print. [my addition]

And so, when we have foot washing services today, they're symbolic of what went on during the Last Supper. But it's more than that...

It's about humbling ourselves and taking on the role of a servant so that we can show the love of Christ to those we're serving.

But I sometimes wonder if the depth of meaning in foot washing is lost on us today.

Because during the time of Jesus, everybody needed to do it. But today, unless you go outside barefoot, we don't really need to wash our feet after walking down the street. Chances are when we come to a foot washing service on a Maundy Thursday, our feet are already clean.

So, as beautiful and symbolic foot washing services are, the heart behind it originally met a need in a radical and humble way. And Jesus says, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

In other words, we should follow the selfless pattern of Jesus. He wants us to reflect His heart. And when we become servants to others, we're really serving the LORD.

LBC Servants Towel

Ask ourselves:

In what ways can we reflect the heart of God this week by serving others?

Pray