
LIFE IN HIS NAME

SERVICE IN SEVEN WORDS

John 13:1-17

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. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward 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 only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was 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 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."

Today's message is on the subject of service. It would be difficult to construct a fictional story or to piece together a teaching that could communicate the importance of service stronger or louder than this passage of scripture. This is the Last Supper. Jesus is about to be betrayed. He knows he is going to the cross. This is his moment with his apostles that will change the world. He is facing a task that is beyond our comprehension in terms of suffering and the purpose for which he came.

I would suggest that you or I in this moment, in this kind of testing, facing betrayal from Judas, facing betrayal from the people of God that were supposed to follow him, that should have followed him according to the promises of scripture, facing intense suffering – we would not have been thinking about serving others. The statement is so strong in terms of

its symbolic significance you can't miss it. But if you could miss it, just so you don't miss it, Jesus then states it. "I have left you an example to follow. Truly, truly I say to you, I am your Master, I am your Teacher. You are the follower, you are the student. You are not greater than the Master, than the Teacher. You are not exempt from this. This is my call for your life."

God has called us to serve. That's interesting, because in this passage he tells us that this is not just a command that we are to obey, but this is what a blessed life looks like. In fact, that's where the passage ends. The last verse that we read, verse 17, says that if you know these things and you do them, you are blessed, your life is blessed. We are prone to think the opposite. We are pretty good consumers, aren't we?

Adam has introduced me to some good barbecue over the years. He is a bit of an expert, I think, in barbecue. We went to a new barbecue place in town, and wouldn't you know it? A friend from church showed up. He was really dismayed when he walked in because you actually had to stand in line and order your food and wait for your food. He just told me flat out, "Man, I want somebody to come to my table and serve me."

Wherever you are, I know you're here this morning: You can't hide, brother. I actually tend to agree with my friend. That's part of what I like when you go out to eat. You get served. It's nice. In fact, I have some pretty specific expectations about how I want that service to take place. When I want something, I want the waiter or waitress to be there and be attentive, but I don't want them to be too attentive so that they are always interrupting the conversation.

My point is this: We know how to consume. I think we live in a culture that has perfected the art of consuming. I think I am right in saying that my wife and I are consumers that appreciate good service. When we go somewhere and we get good service, we tell the person and we tell the manager.

Likewise, we are the people you are with who embarrass you when we get bad service. "Excuse me. Can I speak to the manager?" We have been trained to have certain expectations, and you know what? I personally get all about rewards and miles and points. You know, I want to make the most of my consumption. Jesus says that's not what life is about. Life is about serving, not about being served.

I want to be clear here for a moment. There is an ability that we have to enjoy life without feeling guilty for every little moment of goodness and kindness and pleasure, and that is pleasing to the Lord. I said Adam Greenfield is a bit of an expert in barbecue, but it really is interesting because he has a lot of knowledge. He does it and does it well. He enjoys it and I enjoy it more when I'm with him, because he educates me about different parts of the meat and how they're cooked. I don't know where he gets this knowledge. I'm energized by people who enjoy what they are doing, who enjoy life. The message is not intended to be a rebuke of that, but to call us to the greatness of serving.

Before we jump in to our seven words, I want to introduce this a little bit more fully and tell you, especially if you're here today and you don't know Jesus Christ, if you are not in a personal relationship with God I want to tell you that God wants to give you a new identity. He wants to make you a new you, a changed person.

When you go to the beginning of the bible and you start, it starts with creation. God makes everything, then mankind is made as the crowning achievement of God's creation. And you get only two chapters before mankind blows that and sins against God. The sin is really bad. Adam and Eve sinned, but then just the destruction that sin brings. We rebel against God and that brings death in every sphere. In Genesis 4 Cain kills Abel and it's painful. It's ugly. Very quickly this spreads and it characterizes humanity.

So what does God do? He brings righteous judgment in the form of a flood. We read about Noah and how God preserves Noah and his family. But very quickly sin is spreading and death is spreading. Almost immediately you are reading about the Tower of Babel where mankind is trying to use God-given gifts to build a tower for our own glory, separate from God.

Listen very carefully. At this critical point in human history -- God makes us, sin, death, severe judgment that just keeps spreading-- what does God do? In Genesis Chapter 12 he calls Abraham, and he gives Abraham some promises. He says, "Abraham, I'm going to do something so wonderful. I'm going to bless all the families of the earth through you." It's wonderful.

Here's something that's very interesting about the life of Abraham. His name was really Abram. He was married not to Sarah, but to Sarai. As they progress in the promises of God, they reach a point right when they come to fulfillment, right when they are ready to have Isaac. Abram is 99 years old. Sarai is 89. She is barren. God is about to supernaturally bring the fulfillment. He does something very important in the story. He gives them a new name. It seems like a minor change that takes place, but Abram becomes, as we know him, Abraham, and Sarai becomes Sarah. It's a picture of how through the promises of God, God wants to give you a new identity. He wants to make you a new you. If you are here and you don't know Jesus Christ, that's what God wants for you. He wants to change you, to give you a new heart, a new life.

Part of that transformation (this is for all of us) is that we move from a consumer mindset to a mindset of serving. How does that happen? How does that take place? I am going to break this passage down twice, the first time from a standpoint of how the power of Jesus transforms us, how we experience or access the power of Jesus. In one sense I am calling this first outline Three Power Sources, but Jesus is the source. He just meets us in three different ways.

Three Power Sources

1. Jesus cleanses us.

I don't know if you know this, but some churches do foot washing the way we do baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some people have taken this passage to a point of saying that they actually practice it as a sacrament, which I think is a misunderstanding. It's a misguided application, but I've been a part of foot washing services. Has anyone ever seen that or been there? It's a very unusual experience, and it's a very humbling experience when a leader in the church comes up to wash your feet.

If it's of such significance that some churches have put it on the level with baptism or the Lord's Supper, which I think is correct, it's important for us to step back and say, "Okay, what does it symbolize?" In the first eight verses, it is pointing to the cross. Here is what's happening. Jesus is getting ready to give his life on the cross, to die for his disciples, and he dresses himself to serve. The washing of their feet is a symbol. It's pointing to the cleansing that will come because of the cross, because Jesus Christ will give his life to cleanse us from our sin and we will receive that as a gift. We will receive it by faith, trusting in him and in his sacrifice for us.

Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Jesus is teaching here his apostles: "Listen, I came to serve and my service to you on the cross will cleanse you of your sin." This is why when Peter objects – Peter says, "Wait a minute. It's not appropriate. I don't want you to wash my feet," Jesus says, "If I don't wash you, you have no part of me." That's #1. The passage also teaches that Jesus daily sustains us.

2. Jesus daily sustains us.

He daily cleanses us. He moment by moment imparts to us all that we need. When Jesus is teaching this, as he is modeling this for his disciples, Peter objects. He says, "Hey, you're not going to wash my feet." Remember, Jesus said, "Well, if I don't wash your feet you have no part of me." So what does Peter do? "Well, wash my hands, wash my head." You know, sometimes you want to say, "Peter, just be quiet. Say nothing! How much better off you would be!"

But thank God, because Peter's objection opens the door for a second teaching. Jesus explains, and it really makes the first teaching very clear. He says, "Listen, I was teaching you about my cleansing, but you are already clean. My word has been spoken to you. You are clean, and the one who is clean just needs his feet to be washed."

There is a place where there is a one-time cleansing that happens at the point of salvation, at the point of justification. I trust in Jesus Christ. I admit my sin. I am cleansed. I am born again. I come to life spiritually. That's point #1. Jesus cleanses me. Jesus saves me. If that new birth experience -- the moment where you trust in Jesus and receive salvation as a gift -- if that hasn't happened in your life, I pray that it would take place today. There is nothing more important for you in this message than for you to trust in Jesus Christ and to be saved.

But to our dismay, after that happens we still tend to sin, right? I was joking before the service this morning that this is one of those messages – again, it happens to me all the time -- I just don't feel qualified to preach this message. I've got a lot to learn about serving others. I want to grow in it, but certainly feel I need to hear this message as much or more than I need to preach it. But the good news of this passage is that Jesus washes my feet. Jesus cleanses me daily of my sin and grants to me – listen very carefully – wisdom, sanctification, righteousness, power. Jesus is my life, and I daily receive from him all that I need to live the life that he calls me to live. That's the second way Jesus graciously meets us. The third is found in verses 12 through 17.

3. Jesus shows us the way to live by his own example.

Jesus now transitions into an application where he is saying, "This is not just something I do for you once and for all, something I do for you on a daily basis, but this is also something that I do for you so that you will follow my example and live this way with other people. That gives you an overview of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah. God wants to give you a new identity. He cleanses you. He daily meets you and provides for you. And he has given you an example so that you would live a life to be a blessing to others in service to others.

Having said that, let's go back through the passage and just look at how service is described to us here, because it's a very powerful portrayal of what a life of service looks like.

Service In Seven Words

1. Love.

Verse 1. We are told that in verse 1 it's the feast of the Passover. Jesus knew his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father. He is about to die, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." He loved them to the uttermost. We say, "So and so left nothing on the field. He just poured it all out. He gave it all. Jesus loved his own to the end. He tells us that service is an expression of love.

This was an important and a difficult lesson for me to learn as a young man. When my wife and I married, I thought the one way you told your wife that you loved her is you just verbally told her. Some men struggle to say that. Some people struggle to say it. Words were not a problem for me, but I didn't understand how important service was in our particular relationship and how important it was to (light bulb comes on) actually demonstrate that love in some tangible way. Love is expressed through service. Serving is an expression of love, #1.

2. Undistracted.

Verse 2. This is just amazing to me. We are told here the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. Jesus is completely aware of that and he is undistracted. Think about how tempting it is when we are going along and someone betrays us, someone disappoints us, someone speaks against us, someone secretly plans to undo us. Jesus does not allow that to distract him from the opportunity to serve in the moment. That is just amazing, isn't it? How easily we are distracted from this life calling. Undistracted.

3. Security.

Verse 3. "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..." Look at picture. Here is Jesus. He knows who he is. He knows he has come from the Father. He knows eternally who he is in the Trinity and what God the Father has called him to do. Service flows from a heart that's made secure in Jesus Christ. It's very helpful for you and me to understand this, that when we come to Jesus we are forgiven. We are set free. We are in him. We don't have to prove our significance. We don't have to make up for our past. We are set free so that we can think of others and so that we can give our lives in service to others. #3, verse 3: Security.

4. Humility.

Verses 4 and 5. Jesus "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." He actually took on the dress of a servant, humbling in and of itself. But as we've mentioned before already in this series, anticipating this passage, this act of service was just so unthinkable. This was not something the disciples would have even imagined as a possibility.

For the most part, Jewish slaves could not be required to wash their master's feet. There was debate as to whether or not Gentile slaves could be made to do it. It was considered demeaning and it was unexpected. It was certainly something that completely unexpected amongst the disciples. Jesus shatters their understanding of what service would look like when he himself, Creator of the universe, Savior of the world, dresses himself in humility to serve his disciples.

It's interesting, and if I could speak to the men for a moment, if I could speak to fathers and husbands, just a very specific part of our group this morning. Sometimes there is something in our understanding of the masculine where we are not reluctant to make the big sacrifice, but we don't always connect that to the moment by moment daily sacrifice of serving others. I don't want to say this is true of all of us here, but sometimes when faced with the big tests of doing the right thing, we choose to die. But the difficult test of denying what I want in this moment, to prefer someone else, is difficult for us.

I can't speak for you, but it reveals my tendency toward selfishness apart from Christ, and how I need Jesus to daily wash me and cleanse me. It should give me patience when I think I see selfishness in someone else. See, in my mind, if I'm on the eve of making that ultimate sacrifice that gives me a pass from having to deny myself in this moment.

You know, there are Sundays where I go home from church – I know this is hard for you to believe, but this is hard work up here. So I go home, you know, and there I am, sitting down. My wife is like, "Hey, Sweetheart, could you wash the dishes? Could you take out the trash?" Do you know who I am? Were you not there today? Right?

We have an amazing capacity. We serve a little. We sacrifice a little then we step back. Where is the recognition? Where is the notice? Right? Genuine humility, and it leads into the fifth point.

5. Secret.

Verses 6-11. I chose this word because I think that Peter in these verses is seeking to outdo the other disciples. "You're not going to wash my feet. It's not appropriate. Not me." "Okay then, wash all of me." Peter is just that annoying brother who is always calling attention to himself, so it seems to me in this moment. This is an important lesson for us. It's an important part of the message. It demonstrates how we can take something like humility and service and try to use it to elevate ourselves.

When I was in seminary and before I came here, I was part of a church where I was on staff part-time while in school. It exploded and it was growing, then sadly it imploded. Most of that happened after I left, but this weird thing happened which vividly illustrates this point. They had had a moment where they washed one another's feet, and one of the young seminary students washed the pastor's feet. He later got in trouble, not from the pastor but from another leader -- listen to this language -- because he washed feet up the ladder. How? How do you take this passage and use it as a means to lord your authority over other people? I mean, you have got to be good to do that. You've got to be so crafty and creative. If I might say so, doesn't it just seem so inappropriate?

I wish I could say that's never in my heart, friends, but that would be a lie. We can take precious things and use them, even things that really appear: "Oh no, don't look at me...are you looking?" Secret service kills the flesh, crucifies our sinful nature, and it's so good for us spiritually, so good for our souls.

6. Lifestyle.

Jesus then tells them, "Hey, I've given you an example. I'm the Teacher. I'm the Master. How much more?" Again, the emphasis is so strong from the context. It's so strong from the symbolism and the act that Jesus has done. Now he opens it up and he specifically teaches it, then he specifically tells them to do it. He tells them now, magnifying that, "I'm the

Master and the Teacher. You're the student. You're the pupil." I mean, it's one emphasis piled up on another. Then as if that isn't enough, he says, "Truly, truly I say to you..."

I think Jesus wants us to get this point, that this should characterize our lives and that this should be lifestyle for us. This is what leadership should look like. If the Master serves, if the Teacher serves, how much more? We might be tempted, left to ourselves, to be selective on the occasions that we will serve, the people we will serve. It might be attractive for us to serve some and not others. We might resent it if not properly responded to. We might be tempted to keep a record of our service to others. We might see some as unworthy. Jesus takes all of that and sweeps it away and says, "Listen, this characterizes you. I've called you. I've transformed you. I've given you a new identity. It's all a gift. It's all my mercy. You are totally secure in me. I've met your ultimate needs. I'm meeting your daily needs. Draw close to me. Follow my example. You have nothing to worry about. I am caring for you. You are now set free to know the joy of living a life that is a life lived to bless other people." Isn't that great? Isn't that glorious? Amen.

7. Action.

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them," verse 17. It's good to talk about it. It's good to acknowledge it, but it's dangerous to talk about it then not do it. It's a lifestyle, and it's a lifestyle that God calls us to do moment by moment, to do it, to act.

As I was preparing this message, I started thinking about the people who serve me. I started thinking about my wife and the way she has orchestrated her entire life to serve our family. It's just amazing. I don't know that the world looks at what she does and says, "Wow, this is so commendable," but I think Jesus does. I looked at our elders and the way they serve this church and the time they give and the way they extend themselves, and I think it's just amazing. I'm so blessed because of their contribution. I was thinking about Adam Greenfield. Here is a man who has the ability, I think, to be a lead pastor, and he is in a role where he is serving the church in a way that doesn't call attention to him. It's commendable.

We are not about titles, Jesus says. We are not about levels. We are not about position. We are not about being first. If anything, we are about the opposite of all of that. It's God's call for our lives as a lifestyle, even if it doesn't get noticed because we know the joy of walking out a new identity, following the example of Jesus. He is our source. He is our strength. He is our power. He is our example. It's wonderful, good news.

Here is the application for you. First of all, if you're here and you don't know Jesus Christ, come to him today. Receive the gift of eternal life. Receive the gift of salvation. In this sense, I am going to contradict how I started. You must be a consumer in this moment. You must be a consumer like you've never consumed before. You must receive the gift of

eternal life. You can't earn it. You don't deserve it. It's God's gift. By faith, receive so that you might be set free to live a life of serving others as a blessing to others. That's the first and foremost way to respond.

For all of us here, there is a call to be strengthened in Christ, to be renewed in him so that we might live for service.

I am going to ask you to bow your head, if you would. Our worship team is going to come and they are going to prepare to lead us in a closing song of worship. But before they do, I want to ask you to respond to this message. First of all, for those here saying, "I came today. I have not really trusted in Jesus. I have not experienced salvation, new birth, the Spirit of God coming in and making everything new." Maybe you've been in church services many times, but you say, "I really don't have a relationship with God. I need to receive the forgiveness of my sin. I just need to trust in Jesus." I want to lead you to do that today. I want to pray for you.