

Special Messages – The Secure Servant

John 13:1-17 | Sunday, January 13, 2019 | By Brian Brookins

SPECIAL MESSAGES

THE SECURE SERVANT

John 13:1-17

As we invite you today to be part of Kid Min, I want to talk about serving, this important part of following Christ. We say, “Gather, Connect, Serve, Grow.” Gather – we are gathering right now. We have various Gather expressions. This is the main one. On Sunday morning, at 10:00, the word of God is proclaimed and taught. We worship the Lord together in song. It’s a very important part of what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Every week we want to gather. God meets us in this place. We connect in small groups. We serve. We serve the church, the city, and the world in word and deed.

There is a rich volume of scripture that speaks to this attitude and action of serving as we follow the Lord Jesus. The last of our four basic commitments in following Christ is Grow. That talks about prayer and spiritual disciplines, getting in the word of God. Right now we’re going to look at Serve as we read 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

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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.

Jesus is about to be betrayed. He is hours away from trial, from deep anguish and suffering. He is about to go to the cross. The text begins with Jesus knowing that his hour had come. He understands that he is about to go and to offer himself for the forgiveness of our sin, to pay for the guilt, to pay the punishment, to remove the shame for everything that's separating us from God. God has a plan to restore all of his creation and it centers on these events that are about to take place.

Friends, if we can gather this -- just the intensity, the immensity of the suffering that Jesus is enduring. He knows it. Many times the worst part about suffering is the anticipation leading into that horrific experience. But Jesus understands this, and that is coupled with a perfect knowledge that one who is a friend, one whom he loves, one who sits at his table is about to betray him. And in the midst of this adversity, Jesus dresses himself to serve, and he serves his followers. He washes their feet.

The description by John is very deliberate. He dresses himself. He gets the water. He puts it in the basin. He is performing an act that even servants were typically not asked to do. There are various customs and various expressions of this, but in certain circles a Jewish servant could not be required to wash feet; it would have to be a Gentile servant. There are various understandings of just how menial this act of service was that Jesus now performs for all of his apostles.

You understand Peter's objection, right? I mean, we laugh at Peter. Peter is like, "What are you doing? Are you washing my feet?! No, you are never washing my feet!" Jesus said, "If I don't wash your feet, you have no part of me." So as only Peter can do: "Okay! Wash all of me!"

There is so much in this passage, because there is a lesson in every part of it. I mean, really, what's the lesson there? When we take serving and humility and use it as a way to exalt ourselves, that's disgusting. And we do it. Right? We do it.

Yesterday my wife and I had a moment where we rehearsed to one another how lucky the other one was -- all the things we had done in that day. It's just a part of our human condition. Yet Jesus comes to free us from that, to be transformed in our hearts, to have the heart of a servant.

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I'm going to give you two points today, but before I do, I want to interpret the significance of the washing of the feet, so there's no confusion. Sometimes I give you the points of the message and I want the text to be really clear for us.

1. First of all, it's very clear that the washing of feet represents the cross.

It represents the cleansing that takes place because Jesus is going to pay for our sin. That's clear in the passage in a number of ways. As I said, from the very beginning we are told that Jesus understood that his hour had come. Then we are told that in the interchange between Jesus and Peter, Jesus says, "What I am doing now you don't understand, but afterward you will." He is referencing the cross.

It's very clear that this is now a living parable, if you will. Jesus is enacting the cleansing that takes place when Jesus goes to the cross to pay for the penalty of our sin. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven. All who put their faith, their hope in Jesus Christ are cleansed of everything that separates them from God, of every judgment.

2. Secondly, the foot-washing symbolizes an ongoing daily renewal.

When Jesus makes it clear to Peter that, "Hey, if you don't let me do this, you have no part in me," I think that's a reference to the cross. Then Peter is like, "Okay, wash all of me!" Jesus says, "Wait. You are clean. You've been bathed. Now I'm going to wash your feet." I think it's a beautiful picture of how we daily live in the reality of the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done, and we are cleansed. We come in from the roads of the world with crud and filth on our feet and we are renewed again as we trust in Jesus, as we receive, as we come to the Lord's Table. We just live by the grace that is ours in Jesus Christ.

So when we have that horrible day and we are especially mindful that we've blown it and there's evidence all around us that we're just a mess and we feel it, we feel it intensely, we don't have to get saved all over again. We don't have to get a bath all over again. We just say, "Lord, my hope is in Jesus. Wash me. Cleanse me. Forgive me. Thank you, thank you, thank you."

When I go home after preaching a horrible sermon, I pray for you and then I say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you. Jesus, you saved me. My hope is in you. My hope is not in being a great preacher. I'd like to be a half-decent one, but my hope is in you."

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This is so redemptive for every key role in your life. Parents, bad news: You will scar your children. When they are 35 they're going to say, "Remember when they did this and this?" They're going to laugh and tell stories. You did it. They'll do it. We make mistakes. We make big mistakes.

I remember one of the most heartbreaking times for me as a dad was when I was wrestling with my son. Part of the beautiful thing about wrestling is that it teaches boundaries. It's a healthy activity for fathers and sons, okay? I'm just sanctioning healthy wrestling. But there was this moment when my son crossed the line and I got really angry. Then I overheard him just grieving that this glorious moment had been turned into him blowing it. His talk was this kind of self-hate. "I always do this. I blow it." You see how my sin in this moment is bringing this deep insecurity and pain to one of the most precious people in the world to me? Can I tell you, Jesus Christ paid for that sin?! He paid for the way you wreck the lives of the people that you love. And if you have people in your life that you love and their lives are wrecked, trust in Jesus. Don't live forever in the guilt and the regret. Go to the cross. He redeems! He restores! He does miracles!

Yeah, I go to that son in that moment and say, "Son, please forgive me. I am so sorry. Forgive me for my anger. Forgive me for my impatience. Yes, I want to teach you about what's appropriate. But what you experienced in that moment was my need for savior, was my sin, and this, son, is why we put our hope in Jesus Christ."

So, one-time cleansing, right? You don't get saved, lose your salvation, get saved, lose your salvation, get saved, lose your salvation, because then it's like a Russian roulette. You better die in the moment when you're saved and not lost. That's one, that's two.

3. The third application is: I've set an example for you to follow.

You live like I've just modeled for you. I'm going to fold one and two into one, because it's the work of Christ that we receive. It's his grace. Now, serving others is a work of grace. We do it by the strength that he gives us, but if you can look at these two dynamics, they feel like a contradiction. And that's what we're going to focus on. They are not a contradiction. They are parts of our Christian experience and we want to look at them.

So let's put both points up on the board. Here's how I want to phrase them, taking right from the text, especially the first one, verses 1-11: **You are loved.** And verse 12-17: **You are a servant.** Let's jump in to #1.

I. You are loved.

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This is proclaimed right in verse 1. We are told that what Jesus is about to do, and all the significance of it, is an act of his love. He says, "...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." He loved them to the uttermost. There is nothing lacking, nothing incomplete. He loves them.

Just so you understand, in the context there is a real focus on the apostles. But it becomes clear by the time we move through this section of the gospel of John that Jesus is doing this, and including in it all who are in Christ, all who trust in Jesus.

For example, in John chapter 17, verse 20 and following, Jesus is praying that last part of the prayer. It's very explicit. Jesus says to the Father, "...and I'm not just praying this for these that are here, but for all who will believe in me. We are all one. We are all in your love. We are all sharing the love, Father, that you and I share."

You are loved. This is an important connection. That is connected with: "You are clean. You are already clean because of what I have done." What keeps us from love and intimacy is sin, is our brokenness. Jesus comes to serve us, to cleanse us, so that we are free to receive and experience the healing love of God.

I think of the picture in the life of Jesus, the miracles he does are very moving. He heals those that are suffering with leprosy. In particular, there is the case of the 10 lepers who go. The leper would proclaim to you if you were approaching him: "I am unclean. You can't come near me. It's not safe." Jesus heals these 10 lepers and he tells them to go present themselves for cleansing. Then only one returns to give thanks. And that one who returns to give thanks? Jesus then turns the miracle into a moment of salvation where he proclaims him not just clean physically but that his soul is clean, that he is healed, that he is saved. It's a picture of salvation, the cleansing work of what Jesus has done. We can't pay for all of our mistakes. They can't be undone except by the work of Jesus and what he does for us.

Now, here is the beautiful picture of this. It's amazing when you see this, because Jesus, in the love of the Father, does everything he does out of this amazing security. It's described for us in verse 3, I believe. Pick it up in verse 2. "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him..." Look at this description of security. "...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..." he gets dressed to serve, and then he serves.

Friends, when we receive the love of God that comes to us in Christ, there is a healing that takes place, and a security that becomes ours. So we can really say, "I am loved. I am valued. I am treasured. I matter. God notices. God is aware. My pain is not ignored. Who I am is someone of significance before God." Those thoughts: "I am in need of cleansing. I am cleansed by Christ, and I am loved. I am treasured" -- that seems like a lot for us to fathom. There is this place of security.

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John Owen, the great Puritan, in his classic Communion with God says, “We have an intimate relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” He says, “If you come to the Father and you don’t grab ahold of the fact that the Father loves you, and that when you were lost and far away from him, he sent the Son to redeem you, to buy you, to pay for your sin, to bring you back to him, out of his extravagant, inexhaustible love – that transition, that click is the first step to everything that’s going to follow. **You will never pursue God if you don’t understand that he loves you.** If you cannot say, “I am loved by God,” then God wants to change that. Security.

There is a continual experience of washing. I am convinced that many times people don’t spend time with God in prayer and in the Word because we see it as an obligation. We see it as a duty. We know we should do it. We call it a spiritual discipline – it’s something I have to discipline myself to do. “Alright, I need to eat right. I need to exercise. I need to sleep. I need to pray. I need to read my bible. And frankly, I just want to eat whatever I want to eat, and I don’t want to go to the gym.” Right?

It is a spiritual discipline, but when we get comfortable with the fact that, “I am in need. I need what I can only get from Christ, and I will get it,” I go in that place and I just want to sit there and receive. I want to open the word of God and say, “Okay, where am I going to see the plan of God, the love of God displayed to save that I experience in Christ now by the Holy Spirit – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Typically, I want to go through my day with these three things in front of me. I want to start in the word of God – with grace I can receive to interpret life in terms of three things. **I’m going to give you a model for opening God’s word: Read a verse, read a paragraph, read a unit and say, “Okay, what does this teach me about God?”**

Two key words there: **God’s plan, God’s love.** We are talking about the Father here. The Father’s plan to bring salvation and to restore his creation is a work of love. We are looking for that in the word. We see it. Then something beautiful happens. **When we begin with the Father, when we begin with God, I can drag myself out of all this mud and junk and get a different perspective. God reigns. God rules. God is awesome!** Right?

Then, I receive in Christ everything I need, everything in that moment. Because the moment I become a little aware of God, I’m aware of my own unworthiness, of my inadequacy. I’m aware of my need. I need wisdom. I need grace. I need patience, and I receive it in Christ, provided for me. I may not see it in the text, but I receive it in Christ, by faith in him.

Then, beautifully, I experience it now (let me just go Pentecostal for a second) **by the Holy Ghost** -- the Spirit of God in me, revealing Christ, saying: Receive. I want you to go live this out. I don’t want you to leave this place of intimacy with me, then just go act like you’ve always acted. I don’t want that. I want you to believe that I’m with you. **I want you to be sensitive to my empowering presence in your life.**

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Okay. There is a continual experience of washing. Friends, I would like to linger here, but the real sermon is for the last point. I want to motivate you (I would say manipulate you, but motivate you) to serve! But you won't do it until you know you're loved and you're secure. You won't do it right. You'll do it like Peter. "Oh, wash all of me! Look at me! Aren't I a big deal?" No, no, no. That's not what we want.

I linger here because I would say this mentality of my (I'm going to use an offensive word) *neediness*, drives me to a place of, "Lord, just give me a few minutes with you to start my day." I cannot tell you how it transforms my marriage. Friends, I am not being dramatic when I say I can be very difficult to live with. To come to the Lord and to see God, then to see the freedom in Christ to say: "Stop trying to control everyone around you and just let me work on you. Just receive. You are a mess."

That's not an inferiority complex. Let me say it like this, okay? What are you going to do, say no? The lesson that's taught here is so powerful: **God himself comes to wash our feet.** We recoil. And it's illustrating an even more powerful lesson: **God himself comes to die on a cross to save you.**

Maybe the best illustration I can give you is this. In our day, sometimes we have family and friends who get terribly sick and they can't take care of their own basic hygiene. Someone in their life has to bathe them, has to wipe them, has to do things that are really difficult. Many of you here have lived that experience. I can only imagine that there's a place where if you are on the receiving end of that, you are thinking: "No, Lord." Right?

That, I think, is the experience the apostles are feeling when Jesus dresses himself to wash their feet. And he says: If you don't receive this, you have no part in me." Until this clicks and I say: "God, I need you. Lord, I need Christ," and you just open your heart and receive, that is like a domino that unlocks everything that happens in the Christian life. It demolishes human pride. It levels us.

Second point. Let's get to the leveling and the beauty of what God does.

II. You are a servant.

Jesus is very deliberate here. He says, "Now, there is a transition, there is a pivot that takes place. He says, "Don't misunderstand. I've come to serve you. I've come to wash you. I've come to cleanse you. I've come to renew you. As that happens, you go and serve." He actually tells them: "If you know these things, you will be blessed..." If what? "You do them." It's an attitude and an action.

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Get ready. Here comes the manipulation. So, when we put out a request: “Hey, we need workers, we need people to serve in Kid’s Ministry,” that’s what we do. That’s who we are. **“I’m a servant. I’m so secure, so loved by God. Let me go do that.”**

Imagine standing before Jesus and he says, “Hey, I want you to go work in the nursery.” “Nope. Sorry. Done my time. Raised my kids. Nope. Nope.” “I died for you.” “Yeah, I’m grateful, but...I don’t do kids.” We have different gifts, and if you hate kids, do not volunteer. You know what? You do well, church. You know who doesn’t do as well as I think we should do? Leaders. It’s your leaders. I don’t know about this, church, maybe not. I’m being funny, but the idea of celebrity pastors and personal kingdoms – it is blasphemous that we would take a dying, crucified Savior to exalt ourselves. I say it’s blasphemous, not because I’m incapable of it, because I battle pride in my own heart, as we all do.

But, friends, let’s just imagine for a moment what God wants to do in transforming this community, where we are so secure in the love of Jesus that we dress to serve and we do it joyfully. We do it recognized, we do it without recognition. We run to that place of saying, “Lord, let me fill this spot. Let me serve you.” Really, when we say the church, the city, and the world, the church – it’s so important and critical for us to be healthy and to care for our own community, but that’s just so we can all spill out into South Florida and beyond, where God has called us. You are doing this, many of you, but we need to be encouraged. We need to receive of the Lord that renewal.

Let me say this. I’m going to close here very quickly. Let me just give a disclaimer or two. I will speak to my wife for a moment. She has raised six amazing kids, like *really* amazing, if I do say so myself, with me as a deadweight, dragging me along. We see what we do here as a partnership. We have just sent off our youngest. I want my wife to have a break. I want to say: “Just rest. Close the kitchen. Take a moment.” We love foster care and one of my dear friends is an exec at 4 Kids. Every time he sees Beth, he’s like: “Hey, do you want to foster?” I took him aside and said, “Leave her alone. She adopted two kids. She raised six. When she wants to foster, she’ll knock on your door. We’ll let you know.” “Oh, Brian, so sorry.”

It’s okay to rest. Maybe you’re here and you’ve been hurt. You’ve been beat up. Get whole. Get healed. No guilt. That’s not what we are about. That’s not what this is about. **But don’t let a season become your entire life.** Guys, listen to this: You’ve been hurt. I can’t remove that. But Judas is at the table, and Jesus says, “Don’t think you are greater than me! Don’t think you get a pass. No, no, no. I’m going to heal you. Yes, you’ve got to get whole. You’ve got to experience my love and receive my cleansing. It may take a while. It may take years. You are free to do it, but don’t let a season become your whole life.” That’s powerful.

As much as we need to get real with ourselves about our need to get healed and to get whole, we also need to be real about the temptation then to make that an identity, which is not what Jesus wants for us, Amen?

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