

Wear The Towel – John 13:1-20

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We're starting a new chapter in the book of John – John 13:1-20. Having finished the *first* part of John's gospel, the *public* ministry of Jesus, we're now well into Passion Week in his account of Christ's life. The days leading up to the cross and resurrection.

And the first event we find is the famous foot-washing at The Last Supper. A meal made legendary by **Leonardo da Vinci** in 1498. It probably wasn't that nice, and they probably sat in a circle on the floor, but you get the picture.

And you need to. Because The Last Supper is the scene of the next five chapters. Chapters 13-17. Commonly called The Farewell Discourse. Or Upper Room Discourse. Discourse meaning speech or sermon. In other words, they sat around a table and listened to Jesus talk long into the night. How cool is that? Can you imagine?

I remember being a fly on the wall when my parents and aunts and uncles did the same thing with my grandpa back in the day. Telling stories and reminiscing. Laughing and arguing. It was awesome.

But never once did somebody get up and start washing feet. That would have been ridiculous. And yet that's exactly what Jesus did. And did for a reason. Did, to drive home a point. Which he gets to in v12-16. Which is where I'd like to start.

[12] 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? [13] You call me Teacher and Lord [Rabbi and Master; Leader], and you are right, for so I am. [14] If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. [15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. [16] 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. (ESV)

The point is this:

We should serve like Jesus served (v12-16)

Straight from the heart of this paragraph. *If I . . . have washed your feet* [v14], you should wash each other's. *[15] For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* Which is what? Literally wash each other's feet? And *only* wash each other's feet? "*Do just as I have done to you*" in that respect?

Obviously not. He did it as an example, v15. **It's an example**. Key word. Jesus washed their feet not as a pattern, but an example. An example of service. *Doing* something for someone. Something needed. Something desired. Something beneficial. It's an example of service.

Including the lowliest service. Because foot washing in those days was a dirty, menial task. The environment was dusty, people wore sandals, and their feet got dirty. So homeowners provided a towel and wash basin, and wealthier ones provided a servant.

Except on this occasion, there *was* no servant. So Jesus stepped in and used the opportunity to *model* servanthood. Giving us an example to follow. An example to serve like he served.

What he didn't do, was institute an ordinance. It's an example, **not an ordinance**. An ordinance is a particular practice in the Bible, that the church is to do together. Like baptism and communion.

Not foot washing. Some churches *advocate* such a thing, advocate that foot washing is an ordinance, and *practice* it from time to time, but the Scriptures don't require it.

For something to be an ordinance in the Bible, it has to be commanded by Jesus, reiterated by the Apostles, and practiced by the early church; the early church in the Bible. Those are the three criteria for doing something corporately on a regular basis.

And there are only two such practices in the Bible: baptism and communion. Baptism and Communion are the only two commands: given by Jesus, reiterated by the Apostles, and practiced by the early church.

Foot washing is none of the above. Foot washing is an example. An *illustration* of Jesus' command to serve. Something *representative* of what we should do.

Nor did the Apostles reiterate it; anywhere in the New Testament. And there's no evidence the early church practiced it *as* a church.

What they did do was *serve* one another. Meet one another's needs. Help one another. Bless one another. Just like Jesus served them.

That's the point. We should serve like Jesus served.

And before we leave these verses, don't miss the two reasons he gives. First, he's our *Lord and Teacher*, v14, the one who leads and instructs us to live and serve; and second, we're not better than he is. Look at v16 again. *[16] 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.*

He's emphasizing the fact that if *he's* not too good to serve, we're not too good to serve. If the Master does menial work, the servants should. If the Sender is willing to get his hands dirty, the messengers should be.

Two quick reasons we should serve like Jesus served: he's our teacher, and he's our example.

Then, surrounding it, are three *ways* to serve like him, two *more* reasons, and one caveat. Starting in v1.

[1] Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father [the time when he would die on the cross and ascend back to heaven], having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. How good is that? *He loved them to the end.* I love that.

And it's the first way we should serve like Jesus served:

• **Lovingly and faithfully (v1)**

Having loved his own [those who were his, those he led, those with whom he was connected] . . . *he loved them to the end.* (1)

Can I ask you something? Do you *love* people? Do you really *care* about them? Especially those with whom you're connected? Your family and friends; neighbors and co-workers; brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you love them? Really?

Do you yearn for their good? That they would know the best of God's blessing in life? The joy of his grace? The peace of his presence?

If you don't, you'll never serve them. If you don't love people, you won't serve people. Not like Jesus. Not faithfully. *To the end*. The end of *your* life, the end of *their* life, or the end of your relationship. You won't.

You won't weep with those who weep, listen to those who talk, help those in need, or feed those who hunger. You won't.

You'll be more concerned with yourself. Loving yourself. Wrapped up in your own needs, your own desires. The exact opposite of Jesus. Who knew his end was near, and *still* loved people by serving them. Still made it all about them. Even in his death.

Make sure you serve, and do so lovingly and faithfully.

Second, the second way to serve like Jesus, is to be . . .

• **Determined and undeterred (v2-3)**

Jesus was resolute in his service. Intent. Unstoppable.

[2] *During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, [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, [4] rose from supper.* Jesus rose from super.

He got up and got going. He got up and got at it. Determined, to do something about the situation. (A) Because of his power. (B) Because of his identity. And (C) because of his destiny.

His **power**, because *the Father had given all things into his hands*, v3. Knowing he had the power and ability to address every single situation that presented itself, he was determined to use it. Determined to do something.

(B) Having come from *God*, his **identity** was secure. The Son of God sent from God. The second person of the Trinity. God in the flesh. Who cares if he washed feet! Who cares if "lowered" himself! Who cares what they thought?

And (C), he was determined because his **destiny** was guaranteed. He had the power, his identity was secure, and his destiny was guaranteed. He knew where he came from and he knew where he was going.

It didn't matter what serving cost him. It didn't matter what he gave up. It didn't matter how much time or effort it took. Heaven awaited. The *throne* was appointed. Guaranteed. All of which made him *determined* to serve.

Determined, and undeterred. Undeterred by *Judas* who he knew was going to oppose him, undeterred by the *devil* who had *already put it into the heart of Judas . . . to betray him* (2), and undeterred by the *disciples*. Who were arguing during the meal.

Luke 22:24 – *A dispute also arose among them [the disciples], as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.* Are you kidding me? He got up to serve them, and they lowered themselves to bicker. Opposition abounded. From Judas, the devil, and the disciples.

And still, Jesus rose up. He got up and got going. He got up and served. Determined and undeterred.

An example, to do the same. Instead of worrying about getting tired, or how much is required, or what the obstacles are, we should serve like Jesus served. And we can.

God gave him strength, he'll give you strength. God knows him, God knows you. And your destiny? A place prepared in heaven, and a seat at the table.

The only thing left is to get up and get going.

Third, we should serve like Jesus . . .

• **In complete humility (v4-5)**

V4-5. Having rose from supper – *He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. [5] 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.*

Can you say "humble?" That's crazy. And if it weren't Jesus, we might think he was being overly dramatic. Taking off his outer garments, wearing a towel, kneeling before every single disciple, and washing their dirty feet with his hands. He wore the towel.

But it wasn't drama. He was simply doing whatever it took. Humbling himself *by taking the form of a servant*, Philippians 2, just like he humbled himself to take the form of a man. That's serving like Jesus. Doing whatever it takes in complete humility.

And don't miss the lesson in leadership here. With the name above *all* names, and the title above all *titles* – from Son of God and Prince of Peace to King of kings and Lord of lords – he served in complete humility. To show that leadership isn't found in a title but a towel.

It's like the guy in our church when we first started, a John Deere executive, who washed the windows and cleaned the toilets of the high school where we met, every single week for the first six months. Despite his title, he wore the towel.

Three *ways* to serve like Jesus. Three ways to wear the towel ourselves.

Then come the reasons. Two of them. Starting with the truth. We should serve like Jesus:

• **To convey the truth (v6-11)**

[6] *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"* [Like, how could you? That ain't right.] [7] *Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."* [After he died and rose again. After he served them in death like he was serving them in life. Then they'd understand.]

But not now. Because – [8] Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” [That’d be sacrilege, he thought. Irreverent. Unthinkable.] Jesus answered him [speaking spiritually now, while Peter was still thinking physically], “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” [9] Simon Peter said to him [still thinking literally], “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”

[10] Jesus said to him [once again speaking spiritually], “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. [In other words, the one who has bathed, the one who is saved, is completely clean.] And you are clean [you plural; referring to the disciples in front of him], but not every one of you.” [11] For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

Jesus seized the moment to convey the truth. To connect the dots between what he was doing and what it meant. What he was doing, and why.

Namely, to illustrate their need to be washed of their sin. Their need to be cleansed within. “If I do not wash you [v8b], you have no share with me.” “No part of me. No part of my righteousness and no share in my kingdom. You need to be washed.” We do.

And from time to time thereafter, cleaned up. V10 again – “The one who has bathed does not need to wash [or bathe all over again], except for his feet. We don’t need to be saved all over again, we need to be sanctified. Purified. Cleaned up.

Which makes this whole scene one great big illustration of his ongoing sanctification in our lives.

It’s like the spontaneous spit-baths by mom would give me on the way to church when I was little. Kid you not. She would literally spit in a Kleenex and start wiping my face with it while driving down the road! That just about puts me in the ditch thinking about it!

But it illustrates the illustration here. I didn’t need a whole bath, I just needed some spots cleaned. And so did they. So do we.

It’s the truth he conveyed, while serving as an example for us to do the same. To convey the truth by connecting the dots between what we’re doing and why. Serving in the name of Jesus. Serving because God loves them. Serving to share the Gospel. That’s the first reason.

The second, is . . .

• To reap the blessing (v17)

Serve like Jesus to reap the blessing. After telling us the point of all this in v12-16, he says in v17 – *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* Favored are you. Fortunate. Graced. He doesn’t say, “blessed are those you serve,” though that’s true; but *blessed are you.* Blessed are *you* if you serve like Jesus.

How so? The same way we’re blessed by *any* obedience. Protection, provision, power, and peace. His presence, his strength, and his joy. Wisdom, fellowship, and friendship. Wear the towel like Jesus, and you’ll reap the blessing of Jesus.

And last, the caveat. Serve like Jesus served . . .

• Even though some won’t (v18-20)

[18] *I am not speaking of all of you* [once again referring to the 12]; *I know whom I have chosen.* [I know your heart. And most of you are clean.] *But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’* Referring to Judas. Who didn’t serve like Jesus. And wouldn’t be blessed.

It’s another example of prophecy by parallelism. Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9, where King David said that about a close friend-turned-enemy in *his* day, to foreshadow what would happen in Jesus’ day. And it did. Later that night. In the Garden of Gethsemane.

[19] *I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.* He, as in the Savior sent by God. The drum he’s been pounding all along. Believe in Jesus. (John 8:23-28)

[20] *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.* That verse seems puzzling at first, but in the context of this scene, I think it’s meant to be a great assurance. An assurance that what we’re doing – *serving* like Jesus having been *sent* by Jesus – is part of a great unbroken chain of salvation.

Because whoever receives us – whoever receives the blessing we bring and the truth we convey – receives Jesus; welcomes Jesus. And whoever receives Jesus, receives God.

So don’t let the apathy or busyness or opposition of those who *don’t* serve, keep *you* from serving. Serve like Jesus even though some don’t and some won’t. Because you may end up being part of the connection between those you serve, and the One who sends.

Summary

Three ways, two reasons, and one caveat to wear the towel.

Prayer – Lord, find us not just *willing* to serve like you, but eager. Conform us and clean us to wear the towel like you; to get dirty for the sake of others; to do whatever it takes, even if others don’t. Change our heart and spur us on to love like you and live like you.

You Are Loved