

The Servant King

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Preacher: Gareth Burke

[0 : 0 0] If you have your Bible, turn with me please to the Gospel of John chapter 13 and those verses which we read together, John chapter 13 and verses 1 to 17 at the beginning of the chapter.

Some years ago I was visiting a lady. Her son was a minister who lived in Australia. And as is often the case with a mum, she was telling me what a good boy her son was.

He was a minister there in Australia and well obviously the son just rose and shone on him. And she was explaining to me that he had only recently been ordained into the church where he was ministering.

And she asked me would I like to see the Order of Service for the Ordination. Well I was quite interested and I could see it was the thing to do and she gave me the Order of Service and I read through it. It was pretty standard. There were items of praise.

There was readings from the Bible. There was a sermon. Presbytery people were involved in bits and pieces. But to my utter amazement there was this line which said, The washing of the feet.

[1 : 1 2] The washing of the feet. So I asked her what this was. Well she lived in Belfast. Her son lived in Australia. She hadn't been there. And so she had no idea.

So this intrigued me and I asked a few people about this practice in some forms of Presbyterianism. Were it ordinations they would have the washing of the feet and they said, Yeah that's right. What happens is you get a few men from the Presbytery.

They would have to be carefully selected. And they sit in the front row and along comes the moderator of Presbytery. It must be quite hard to get people to serve in this role I imagine.

And they've got to get down with a basin and wash the feet of some of the elders. No I love the men in my Presbytery.

But I just couldn't see it, you know. The literal washing of their feet. And of course the biblical warrant for it comes from this passage. They would argue that Jesus here in John 13 by the action in which he engaged was establishing a practice which is to be repeated in the church throughout the ages.

[2 : 2 8] It's certainly a remarkable passage. The disciples along with Jesus have gone into the upper room. The cross looms.

It's Thursday evening in a little time. Jesus will leave this upper room, go out to the Garden of Gethsemane. There he will be betrayed by Judas. He will be arrested and thereafter will follow the trial.

The crucifixion itself. So it's the Thursday evening. They're in the upper room and the disciples with Jesus have gone in there. It seems that the meal that they're engaging in has already started.

Verse 2 states, the evening meal was being served. So once again as we saw last night, the disciples with Jesus are lying on these fairly low couches around a low table.

They're balancing themselves on their left elbows with their legs out the back. But nobody has washed their feet.

[3 : 34] It was a custom. When you went to somebody's house, the servant would have washed your feet. Remember of course in those days in Israel the disciples with Jesus would have been going around with open toed sandals.

The roads were dusty and dirty so your feet got dirty and smelly as well. You know the open toed sandals, they're I'm sure quite in fashion again and many of you I'm sure have appear.

My fashion advisers tell me you must never wear them with socks. And of course they didn't. In the days of Jesus they just wore them open toed and their feet were dirty and you went into the house and the servant washed your feet.

And all the kit was there for this to happen. The big basin, the jug, the towel. But nobody did it.

Can't you just see them reasoning among themselves? I'm not going to do that. John can do it but I'm not going to do it. John's kind of soft and he's more caring than the rest of us.

[4 : 39] Maybe John will wash her feet but I'm not going to do it. How embarrassed, how humiliated they must have felt. When Jesus rose up from the table with all the awkwardness that that involved, rising up from the couch and he took off his outer cloak.

And he girded up the coat that he had on. And he went over and got the jug and poured some water from the jug into the basin. Brings the basin round each one of them and gets down to wash their feet.

Peter of course is having none of it. He always has to speak. He just can't cope with this. He sees that this is a terrible thing that none of them have been willing to wash each other's feet and to carry out the role of the servant.

And here is Jesus who is their Lord and Master. And now he's having to do the lowly, humble task. Peter's not comfortable.

He speaks in verse 6. Lord, are you really going to wash my feet, Jesus says? You don't understand what I'm doing. But I'm going to wash your feet, Peter.

[5 : 56] No, you can't wash my feet, Peter protests. Unless I wash you, you have no part of me, says Jesus. Now what's all this about?

As you look at this passage and as you consider especially the conversation here between Jesus and Peter, you come to realize that we're operating on two levels here. There's a physical level and there's a spiritual level.

There's the sheer physical level of washing feet. But there's a spiritual level in which Jesus in this action is not only ministering to his disciples and helping them practically, but he's teaching them some important spiritual lessons.

And so this morning just now as we come to this passage and as we consider this account of Jesus washing the disciples feet, we've got to operate on these two levels, the physical and the spiritual.

It's evident from the conversation between Peter and Jesus that Jesus is teaching important spiritual truths here. Some time ago I acquired these glasses.

[7 : 06] They're called varifocals, varifocals. That's what they're called. Imagine that quite a few of you wear varifocals here this morning. Most people are impassioned about them. Oh, they're just great.

Save you having two pairs of glasses and plucking glasses on and off. And take a little bit of time to get adjusted to. You need to watch these steps here with the carbons all the same color because you could easily topple and all of that.

Oh, but they're great. I found them just awful. I haven't got adjusted to them at all. You're operating on two levels. The top part means I can look at you and see you clearly and observe whether you're awake or not.

I can see that very clearly. The bottom part's meant to help me to read that on two levels. And we need to have varifocals this morning as we come to this passage because we're operating on these two levels.

Physical and spiritual. And as we try to understand what's happening here, we want especially to focus on Jesus.

[8 : 12] We want to concentrate on Him. We want to notice five things about Jesus in the passage. You see, He's saying something to us here first of all about His humiliation.

Who is Jesus Christ? Well, He's the eternal Son of God. There has never been a moment when He was not.

He has always been. God is triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the triune gods, the eternal God who has always been and will never cease to be.

And Jesus as the second person of the Trinity is the Son of God, the eternal Son who was never created but has always existed.

It is one of the most incredible things to contemplate, the eternity of God and the eternalness of Jesus. Remember when I was in primary six at school, what age are you then? 9, 10?

[9 : 22] And I didn't often think like this. I've got to confess to you, but I remember my friend Brian Eccles and me, we were walking along, we were talking about Leeds United. And suddenly for some reason I said to him, Brian, have you ever thought about the fact that God has always existed?

Now, he was one to talk about Billy Bremner, to be honest. He was on a different wavelength, but it is a startling thought. And here is Jesus, the eternal Son who has always been but in time took to himself flesh, was born of a virgin.

Fed at his mother's breast, grew up as a little boy, became a teenager, lived and moved among men, humbling himself, coming into our world, taking to himself humanity.

And now he who is the eternal Son, the creator of the universe, is kneeling with a towel and some water, washing the filthy feet of his disciples.

It's almost incongruous, almost bizarre that the one who is the Lord of glory, the great Creator God, should humble himself and do the most menial task of the most lowly servant.

[10 : 49] Let us this morning never forget the humiliation of Jesus. He humbled himself. As Paul reminds us in those great verses in Philippians 2, he, Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself.

And here we see that humbling as with water and a towel, he kneels at their feet. What do we learn about Jesus here? Well, we learn something about his humiliation.

But we learn something here also in the second place concerning servant leadership, servant leadership.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 14, Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

Well, that's where our Australian friends get the literalness of the activity of washing feet from. My own inclination is that Jesus is saying, I'm giving you an example here of what's involved in Christian service.

[12 : 25] I'm demonstrating to you in a practical way that you're to be prepared to engage in the humble, lowly action.

Maybe we need reminded of this. We who are in the reform tradition are very much into stressing the preaching of the Word of God and the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God and the service of worship. To that I'm committed, as you are also.

We're very much into stressing that those who are set apart as ministers of the gospel, that the greater part of their time is to be given over to preparing for the preaching of the Word and the delivery of that Word in preaching.

To that I'm committed, as you are also. But we need to be careful that we do not become so compartmentalized in our thinking that he who is set aside to the preaching of the Word of God and to the ministry of God's Word, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, is unprepared to engage in the lowly task.

Jesus, our master, our leader, shows us here that we are to give ourselves in humble service and to be prepared to do the lowly thing.

[13 : 48] You read the life of someone like John Calvin. You see his commitment to the study of God's Word and to the place of preaching. But you see also the amount of time that is spent looking after refugees who have come to Geneva from other places.

You see the amount of time that is spent ministering to widows and others who are in need in Geneva. A practical, caring ministry. A primary calling to the Word and to the study and preaching of that Word.

But other aspects to his ministry as well. You see it in the life of someone like C.H. Spurgeon who is known today still as the Prince of Preachers.

And yet he had a whole range of activities in which he was involved by way of orphanages and in other respects, caring practically for the needy Jesus sets as an example of what's involved in servant leadership and doing the humble task.

We see Jesus in this passage in his humiliation as the servant leader. But we see Jesus here teaching us something especially about justification.

[15 : 03] He's teaching us about justification. As you read through this passage, there's an interplay going on concerning having a bath and washing your feet.

Verse 10, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. His whole body is clean.

Now I would imagine that most of you are shower people. I was going to ask you the question but it's a little bit forward. When did you last have a bath? By that I mean simply probably not all that often do you have a bath.

You're probably into having a shower. People. And it's true of all of us, fellows, girls, everyone, we like the shower, don't we? The power shower is the thing to have.

Why are we getting diverted into a discussion of power showers? Because when you go for your power shower, you wash your whole body, don't you? You wouldn't dream of calling the children to tea and say, tea's ready, don't forget to take a shower. It takes them long enough to come anyway without them having a shower.

[16 : 12] You say, tea's ready, wash your hands, don't you? You're assuming that the rest of them is washed, more or less.

And they just need to wash your hands. And that's the distinction which Jesus is drawing here between a total body wash and just washing a little part of your body.

And what is Jesus saying? And what is he doing here? He's setting before us the glorious truth of justification.

Wasn't Jesus a wonderful teacher? He gave us the spread and he gave us this wine, symbols, elements to represent his broken body his shed blood.

He broke down profound truth into simple portions. That's what he's doing here.

[17 : 12] There was a moment in your life when by the grace of God you recognized and saw that you were a sinner. You came to a point in your experience where you not only knew in your head that you had offended God and broken his law, but you felt it in your heart that you were a sinner before God.

And at that moment by God's grace you were able to look in faith to Jesus Christ. You were able to trust in Him. You were able to ask Him to save you from your sin. You called upon Him, Lord Jesus, be merciful to me.

Save me from my sin or words to that effect. What happened to you at that moment? You were justified in the sight of God. What does that mean? It's a declaration that God makes concerning you.

God looks at you and He says, You are trusting in my son Jesus. Well, He lived for you and He died for you. And because you're trusting in Him by faith when I look at you I don't see you as you are, but I see you as one who is united to Christ by faith.

And I declare that in my sight you are not guilty before me because of what Jesus has done in life and in death.

[18 : 37] Our sins are all forgiven. We are justified, declared not guilty before God.

It's like the total bath. It's transforming our whole position before God has been changed.

Jesus is teaching us about justification, but also, fourthly, this. He is teaching us here about sanctification. He is teaching us about the ongoing struggle and battle and warfare against sin, which is taking place in all of our lives.

That's where the hand washing or the foot washing comes in. Because even though we are justified in the sight of God, even though God has declared that we are not guilty before Him because of Jesus, yet we continue to sin.

And we need to wash our hands. We need to come to God day by day by day, confessing to Him our sin, confessing to Him that we have let Him down, confessing to Him that we've turned aside from His law, acknowledging before Him that we have broken His commandments.

[20 : 00] We need to come to God, recognizing our sin and asking for cleansing because our fellowship with Him is marred because of our sin.

It isn't that we cease to be Christians. It isn't that we've lost our salvation. It isn't that we are justified today and we lose that tomorrow. No, Christ dealt with all of our sin upon the cross.

And when by faith we trusted in Him, all of our sin has been dealt with and forgiven. Nothing, nothing can change that. No one can pluck us out of the Saviour's hands.

But our fellowship with God, our communion with Him is marred through the sin in which we engage. And for this reason we need to keep coming, washing our hands, washing our feet, asking for cleansing, praying for forgiveness that we might walk closely with God once more.

Your son or your daughter is your child. Will always be your child. Nothing can change that.

[21 : 20] There may be moments when there's a strained relationship between you. When the lines of communication just aren't open all that well.

But he's still your boy and she's still your daughter. Nothing can change that. But maybe some work needs to be done.

In terms of engaging and relating to one another, the air needs to be cleared, the lines need to be reopened. By grace when you trusted in Jesus, you became a child of God.

Nothing can change that. When you trusted in Jesus, you were justified in the sight of God. Nothing can change that. He dealt with all of your sin.

But sometimes relationships are strained between us and our Father because of our sin. And we need to bring that sin to him and ask for cleansing.

[22 : 27] We see Jesus in his humiliation. The eternal Son became man, lived among us, did the task of a menial servant.

We see him in his servant leadership. The eternal Son who has come from God to make God known to us. Engaging in the lowly thing.

We see him teaching us concerning justification where bath, where shower, where washed. Totally our sin has been dealt with. But we see him reminding us of the need for ongoing cleansing, for ongoing forgiveness, that we may walk closely with our God.

But I say something else here. Jesus is saying something to us about our love for others.

Our love for others. Judas was present, you see. He was there. His feet were white. Judas.

[23 : 40] Soon he would betray Jesus and Jesus knew that. Soon he would mockingly come up to Jesus in the garden and kiss him. Jesus knew that.

But he washed his feet while they were seeing him. Jesus is teaching us something about love for others.

He washed the feet of his enemy. And he's teaching us something too about our love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Verse 1. He's expressing his love to all of the disciples. Sure, he had a particular and a special bond with Peter, James and John.

We know that. They're close friends. But here he washes all their feet. It's a lovely manner to hear Derek speaking about coming to the table and how it is an expression of our unity in Christ.

[24 : 53] And in a little moment you will come to the Lord's table. You will sit together. You will enjoy communion with the Lord himself vertically if you like. But there is fellowship and communion horizontally also here as brothers and sisters together in the Lord partaking of this bread and this wine.

It's a united testimony to our faith in Christ. And it's so important when we sit at the table that we are those who love one another.

Now within any fellowship of Christ's church, as within any family, there will be tensions. We all within our families have got a great anti-birth, you know, who we kind of pick our way around, isn't that true?

And those family gatherings you had there at Christmastime, they were most pleasant. But there's often somebody, isn't there, at the gathering and you say, well, who's going to bring her? You know, it's your turn.

Not that it's a difficult task. And so it is within the fellowship of the church. There will be those that we just don't click with.

[26 : 10] And personalities clash. But we've got to be careful that we're bearing with one another in love. And as we sit together, that there's no serious, serious problem between us.

Jesus does the lowly thing. The one who has always been who created the universe, pours water from a jug, gets a towel and cleans dirty feet.

The Lord of glory humbling himself. He sets us an example of servant leadership. He challenges us that we would not be unwilling to do the humble thing.

He teaches us concerning this great truth of justification, where bath, we're showered, we're washed, as those who have faith in Him, our sin totally dealt with. But he reminds us of the need to be continually coming for cleansing, to wash our hands that our walk with Him and with His Father may be close.

And in this great action He shows to me and to you, I trust to you, His love for His enemy and for His people.

[27 : 33] And He says to you, and He says to me, Let us love one another, just like this.

Let us pray. We take just a moment in silence to reflect upon this incident in the Scriptures, meditate upon it and to see where we're at in relation to these things.

Am I justified before God? Have I living faith in Jesus? Is He my Savior? And if He is, am I needing to wash my hands this morning?

Needing cleansing.

We thank You, O God, our Father, for Your Word. And we thank You for our Savior. We cannot fully understand.

[28 : 58] Are the one who flung stars into space, could then kneel with a jug and a towel and wash dirty feet.

Thank You for His humiliation. Thank You that He came to live and die for us.

Forgive us for our pride. Forgive us that our own name is too often music in our ears. Give to us this Christ-like, humble, servant attitude.

Help us to love one another. As Jesus loved His disciples here, help us to love one another within the fellowship of this congregation.

Thank You for the glorious truth of justification. Lord, thank You that Jesus dealt with all our sin on the cross.

[30 : 11] Help us to walk closely with Him, we pray. For in His name we pray. Amen.