

WE ARE SERVANTS TOO
[‘We Are’ Sermon Series—**John 13:1-20**]

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 During **supper**, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, “Lord, do You wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.” 8 Peter said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” 9 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” 10 Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, “Not all of you are clean.” 12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? 13 “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. 18 “I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, ‘He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.’ 19 “From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. 20 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.”

I. CONTEXT

A. SETTING

1. Apparently the ‘supper’ (**v2**) is the Lord’ Supper found in the Synoptics

a. **Mt 26:17-30** and **Mk 14:12-26** follow the same pattern

- Preparation for the Passover meal
- Prediction of betrayal
- Institution of the Lord’s Supper
- Prediction of Peter’s denials

b. **Lk 22:1-38**—slightly different order—plus added elements

- Preparation of the Passover meal
- Institution of the Lord’s Supper
- Prediction of betrayal
- **Dispute about who is reputed as greatest**
- Prediction of Peter’s denials
- **New instructions how to do ministry—take two swords**

2. **John’s** account—with three new elements (*)

- * (new element) **Prediction of Jesus’ death [given earlier in the Synoptics]**
- Beginning of the Lord’s Supper
- * (new element) **Foot washing during Supper**
- Resumption of Lord’s Supper
- Prediction of betrayal

- * (new element) **Giving of the new commandment—love one another (vv 34-5)**
- Prediction of Peter’s denial

B. Disciples’ attitudes

1. **Uncertainty**—and some fear—about the future
2. **Alarm** about predictions of Jesus’ death
3. **Anxiety** and **turmoil** about His coming betrayal
4. **Contention** about who should be seen as greatest

C. Key background text for this sermon—**Lk 22:27**

“I AM among you as the one who serves.”

II. TWO IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF JESUS BEING THE SERVANT

[Note: only John gives the important background—not covered in the Synoptics]

A. HIS IDENTITY—**vv 1-3**

1. He was God Himself

a. See verse 3

- He came from the Father and was going back to Him
- All things had been given to Him

b. Read this in context with all the ‘I AM’ statements

- Especially at Lord’s Supper—I AM the one who serves—**Lk 22**
- Also here—**v 19**—I AM He—echoes **John 4**—“I AM He” = Messiah

2. Two ways to read **verse 3**—the world’s way—or—God’s way

3. The world’s way—domination and control

a. Assertion of rights: I am from God—[I AM God]—I am over all!

1. This sounds exactly like the Gentile rulers—in **Lk 22:25**

- Position: attaining and lording an office over others
- Power: gaining and exercising authority over others
- Popularity: extorting adulation from others

2. But Jesus rejected this—**Lk 22:26**—“you are not to be this way”

b. Jesus rejected this *because* He was God—and this is *not* God’s way

c. It is especially notable that John writes this account

- Because John himself had wanted a place of power—**Mk 10:37**
- But he later learned his lesson in humility from Jesus’ crucifixion

4. God’s way—selflessness—and powerlessness—though He was God

a. Jesus was **secure** in His identity

- He needed *none* of these things—position—power—popularity
- b. Jesus knew what true **greatness** was
- Becoming the youngest—a leader being a servant—**Lk 22:26**
- c. Jesus used His **authority** for a greater purpose—read **Jn 17:1-4**

*Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him **authority** over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do.*

1. Authority to give eternal life—to those the Father had given Him
 - Eternal life = to *know* the Father and Jesus Christ
 - Not just to know *about*—not just to understand
 - But to know intimately—**γινωσκω**

2. Purpose: to glorify the Father—not Himself!

d. Jesus was **accountable** to the Father—as His Servant

1. He had been sent by God the Father—with a purpose
 - **v16**—the Servant sent by His Master—[the Father]
 - **v3**—He ‘came forth’ from God
2. He was going back to Him—**v 3**—[implied] to answer to Him

B. HIS MOTIVE—v 1

1. His motive was love

a. He loved them to the end—**v 1**

1. His ‘love’ was—**αγαπαω**—God’s own selfless love
2. ‘to the end’—**τελος**—has several [five] connotations
 - a. **End** of His time on earth—not fullest meaning
 - b. His **end-purpose**—He fulfilled God’s mission completely

Ph 2:8—*obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*

- c. Ultimate devotion—fullest possible love—He died for us
- d. Totality—He died for everyone
 1. Even for the one who betrayed Him—**v 2**
 2. He washed *all* their feet!

- e. End of all time and beyond—eternally—eschatological
- 2. This love-motive was an inherent part of His identity and purpose
 - a. His *being* and *purpose* were to glorify the Father
 - b. Key text explaining this—**Jn 15:8-10**

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

- 1. The Father is glorified by true disciples bearing fruit
- 2. True disciples = who abide in the Father's love and obey Him
- 3. This is exactly what Jesus did—He loved and obeyed the Father
- 3. At the Supper Jesus role-modeled His relationship with the Father
 - a. Not *just* as an example—but because that is who He *was*
 - b. He was not narcissistic—but totally selfless in His love
 - 1. He took no pride in—position—power—or popularity
 - 2. We should take no pride in these things
 - 3. Application: be not 'proud'—but boast of God
 - Take **no pride** in what you **are**—but who God makes you to be
 - Take **no pride** in what God **gives** you—give it away to others
 - Take **no pride** in **servng** God—do it selflessly—in secret
- 4. Jesus was also mirroring God's very identity—God is love
 - a. Again see **Jn 17:3**—eternal life is = to know God and Christ
 - b. Jesus knew the Father *this* intimately—**γινωσκω**
 - c. And Jesus is reflecting to us what He *knows* God to be
- 5. So Jesus' motive—His love—*was* His identity
 - a. His identity went beyond the 'office' of Savior
 - He was not just *called* a 'Benefactor'—see **Lk 22:25**
 - b. His purpose went beyond 'saving' people
 - He loved even those who rejected and betrayed Him
 - c. His 'new commandment' made this *the* sign of true discipleship

vv34-35—*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved*

you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT JESUS DID

A. THE SETTING AND POSTURE OF THE DINNER

1. They ‘reclined’ at the dinner—v 12

2. **EXAMPLE: Describe Middle-eastern dinner on the ground**

B. BACKGROUND OF FOOT WASHING

1. The **Need**—wearing sandals—in the dust and muck—with no paving

2. The host’s **Responsibility**—[and Jesus was the host]

- Provided water for people to wash their own feet
- Or provided servants to do this
- But rarely—if ever—would the host do this himself

3. A **humiliating** act

- a. Touching feet was considered menial work
- b. It was done by Gentile slaves or women
- c. Students did menial tasks for teachers—but not touching feet
- d. Unbecoming attire—was a sign of menial service—of a slave
 - Removal of the outer robe—exposing plain tunic

EXAMPLE: plain grey thobe

- Wrapping towel tied (girded) around waste
- e. Both His action and attire were signs of *lowliness*
 - Such humility was a sign of weakness
 - Despised by both Jew and Greek alike

EXAMPLE: The apron—of a woman

C. THE TIMING OF THE ACT

1. If their feet needed cleaning—it should have been done *before* dinner
2. There was no practical need to do this—they were *already* eating
3. Jesus did this for *another* purpose—to teach them—to set an example

D. THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ACT

1. Jesus used many ways to teach

- **Didactic**—instructional—e.g. The Sermon on the Mount
- **Parables**—spoken word pictures with a single meaning
- **Parabolic acts**—*showed* them things by living examples
 - Jesus *did* something to address a practical need
 - Some of these acts were done also to fulfill prophecy
 - But He further used them as symbols to teach lessons
 - Like when the Old Testament prophets did symbolic acts

2. Other parabolic acts with symbolic meaning

a. The two most obvious ones

- The Lord's Supper
- Baptism

b. Other teaching opportunities

- Cleansing the Temple—**Jn 2** and **Mt 21**
 - Fulfilled prophecy [zeal for your house—**Ps 69:9**]
 - Set stage for predicting His resurrection
 - Later made disciples believe His words and Scripture
- Cursing the fig tree—**Mt 21**
 - Taught disciples about great faith
- Eating grain harvested on Sabbath—**Mt 12**
 - Taught the role of the Sabbath—opposed legalism faith
- Tribute money in the mouth of the fish—**Mt 17**
 - Taught civic responsibility and proper roles of authority
- Calling child to His side—**Mt 18**—dispute about greatness
 - Taught humility—to enter heaven, become as a child
- Admitting children into His presence—**Mt 19**
 - Taught the very nature of the Kingdom of God

3. Two purposes of *this* symbolic act

a. To *show* them what He meant by servant leadership—**Lk 22:26-7**

1. Graphic picture of “I AM the **servant** among you”
2. Living picture of true ‘**greatness**’—being ‘youngest’

b. To *set an example* for His disciples—**v 15**

1. **υποδειγμα**—a pattern to be imitated

- To show by putting before the eyes
- **EXAMPLES: Industrial prototypes—molds**
Sewing pattern
Poor pastoral example—newspaper

2. Purpose of example—Do as I have done to you!

- I have *shown* you what to do and *how* to do it
- Remember—the servant is not greater than the master
- If I the master do this, you the servant should do it too

IV. WHAT JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES

A. JESUS' PARABOLIC ACTS HAD THREE CHARACTERISTICS

1. Usually employed irony
2. Taught a lesson—major point(s)
3. Led to changed attitude and behavior

B. JESUS' USE OF IRONY

1. The state of things
 - I am the Teacher and Master—**διδασκαλος**—**κυριος**
 - It is right for you to acknowledge this
 - What I am doing now does not change that
2. The irony of the *action*—as measured by human expectations
 - People don't expect teachers to serve students
 - But—here the a rabbi is serving his followers
3. The ultimate irony—the cosmic consequences
 - God's very nature and true greatness turn the world upside down
 - This is not just *any* teacher—this is God Himself
 - But His point is not just a metaphor—it is reality itself
 - The great I AM Master—truly **is** the I AM Servant
 - It is not just a teaching point—but the reality itself
 - God *demonstrates* His love for us by humbling Himself

C. CHANGED ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR

- Stop disputing about imaginary greatness
- Put on this attitude of genuine humility
- Real leaders—lead by example
- So—follow my example—and set this same example for others

D. THE THREE MAIN LESSONS

1. God calls us to be **servant leaders**

- a. This is based on a superior-subordinate relationship
 1. There is a ‘slave’—and there is a master – **δουλος** to **κυριος**
 2. The servant is not greater than the master
 3. The Son serves the Father—by serving God’s children
 - b. In the same way—we also serve Christ
 1. As a condition of discipleship and to please the Father

Jn 12:26—*If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me, and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. [serve = **διακονεω**]*
 2. How we do this—by serving those for whom He died
2. Only Jesus can **make us clean**
- a. The foot washing was also symbolic of Jesus’ real cleansing power
 - b. He had *already* ‘bathed’ them—and they were clean—see **v10**
 1. Evidence—**Jn 15:3**

Jn 15:3—*you are **already** clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*
 2. Method—He had pruned them by calling them to repentance
 - c. He *completed* this with the cleansing power of His atoning blood
3. We must **pass it on**—this is our ‘apostolic’ calling
- a. There is a sender—and there is a sent one—**v 16**
 - ‘sent one’ = **αποστολος**
 - b. The Father sent the Son—**vv 3 and 16**
 - Jesus was the Father’s messenger—His ‘apostle’
 - c. Here Jesus *sends* His disciples—see **v 20**
 - So *all* His followers are Jesus’ messengers—‘apostles’
 - d. The nature of the sending—**πιμπω**
 1. Meaning—a sender chooses and sends messenger with a purpose
 2. Messengers always carry something to another—message or gift
 3. We are chosen to carry a message *and* a gift
 - The message of the Gospel
 - The gift of salvation

e. The nature of servant leadership—is to **reproduce** itself

1. Jesus passed it on—and commanded His disciples to pass it on
2. The apostles passed it on to those who passed it on—and on→
3. This results in an endless cycle of reproducing servant leaders
4. The object is not to hold on to it—but to give it away

Mt 10:8 Jesus said, *“freely you received, freely give”*

EXAMPLE: Pay it forward

Not paying someone back—but passing it on to another
Idea first attributed to Benjamin Franklin
Described in essay ‘Compensation’ by R.W. Emerson
Popularized by Coach Woody Hayes
Catherine Hyde’s novel made into a movie in 2000
Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt, Haley Joel Osment
Do 3 deeds for others in return for one done for you