

The Servant King

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Date: 01 March 2020

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- [0 : 0 0] Gracious God, we humbly thank you for all your gifts so freely given, for life and health and safety, for power to work, leisure to rest, and for all that is beautiful in creation and human life.
- But above all, we praise you for our Saviour, Jesus Christ, for his death and resurrection, for the gift of your spirit, and for the hope of sharing in your glory.
- Fill our hearts with all joy and peace in believing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please take a seat. Well, an English lady wrote to a country inn in Switzerland, inquiring about some accommodation before the invention of en-suites.
- So this is some time ago. And so she included that she would like to be as close as possible to the WC, which stands for water closet, which in English, in England means toilet. The Swiss innkeeper, however, was not familiar with this symbol for toilet, and so he thought WC must refer to the Wayside Chapel, a church in the village.
- And so he sent this reply. Dear Madam, I take great pleasure in informing you that the WC is situated nine miles from the house, among some pine trees.
- [1 : 2 2] But it's only open Sundays. And there are a great number of people expected in the summer months, which is unfortunate if you're in the habit of going regularly. It may interest you to know that my daughter met her husband there.
- You'll also be glad to hear that some people bring their lunches and make a day of it. I recommend your ladyship go in the morning where there is organ accompaniment. The acoustics are excellent, and even the most delicate of sounds is heard.
- My wife, unfortunately, is not able to attend regularly. It has been almost a year since she last went, and naturally it pains her not to go more often. Sincerely, Frederick.
- Now, you can imagine after receiving that letter and that misunderstanding of that symbol, she was horrified and booked elsewhere. We can often misunderstand symbols, can't we?
- And today it's not the symbol WC, it's the symbol WF, washing feet, that I think is sometimes misunderstood. It's misunderstood by Peter in our passage, but it's also misunderstood by some churches in our world.
- [2 : 2 9] And so some churches practice actual foot washing. So I think like this slide. And they do it particularly on the Thursday before Good Friday, which is happening for us in a few weeks' time.
- Because that's when Jesus did it in our passage, the night before, the Thursday night before he died on the Friday. One minister has actually put a post on how to conduct a foot washing service.
- And amongst the recommendations, he says, remind the women not to wear stockings or pantyhose, because that makes it difficult. And then he also says, instruct them to come to the service with clean feet in clean foot gear.
- And he ends at the end in the underlying red. Although it is very biblical to wear open sandals, not sure that's the case, it isn't very edifying for the person doing the foot washing.

But you see, repeating it as a ritual, a religious ritual, and even his comment about having clean feet, so it's nicer for the person doing the washing, I think misunderstands what this event was.

[3 : 34] It was a symbol that represented humble service of others out of love, not being edified yourself. And for Jesus, this humble service would lead to his death.

So let's have a look at this and see it from the passage itself. So you know that I'm not making it up, but you can get it from the Bible. We're at point one and verse one. Point one, I need to say, will be the longest point by far.

And I doubt we'll get to point three. So verse one. It was just before the Passover festival, Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the end. In this one verse, John gives us the context to the foot washing, the WF.

And he tells us that it has something to do with Jesus's death in three ways. First, John points out it's just before the Passover festival, did you see? Remember when they sacrificed a lamb to remind them how God used the lamb's blood to save them in Egypt?

[4 : 44] You know, that Egypt was going to be judged. And so when the angel of judgment came and saw the blood on the doorpost, it would pass over the Israelite houses. Hence, it's called the Passover festival.

But do you remember who John has already identified for us as the lamb in his book? It's right at the start. He identifies Jesus as the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

And so this is a very subtle hint of Jesus's approaching death. Less subtly is the second thing where we're told, still in verse 1, that Jesus's hour had come.

And remember from last week, that hour referred to the hour he was glorified at the cross, the hour where he reveals his greatness, that he would do this for us.

And to make it even clearer, John adds, the hour had come for Jesus to leave this world. He's going to die, you see. And thirdly, we're told that having loved his own disciples, he loved them to the end.

[5 : 47] The end here could mean to the end of his life, or it could mean to the end of his love, that is the full extent of his love. But either way, the foot washing, the washing of feet, WF, can hardly refer to that.

I mean, he's still got some hours to live, so it's not the end of his life yet. And washing their feet is hardly the full extent of his love. But his death tomorrow on the Friday, well, that is the end of his life, for a couple of days at least.

And that does show the full extent of his love, doesn't it? And in case you're still not persuaded, that the context for this washing of feet is his death, then John adds in verse 2, that the evening meal, that's the Passover meal, where they're eating the lamb and so on, was in progress.

And the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus, which would lead to Jesus' death, wouldn't it?

In fact, the betrayal of Jesus runs right through our passage like a thread. It's as though John is constantly reminding us of the background that Jesus is about to die.

[7 : 01] And all this helps us to understand that this washing feet has something to do with his death. And what happens next helps us to see how it joins together. Look what happens next in verse 3 to 5.

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Now, before you turn over the page, just notice in verse 3, that Jesus knows he has all power.

He is Lord or King over all. Can you imagine what you would do with that kind of power? I remember one time we had to leave the house and leave the kids at home, and so we had to designate one child to be in charge.

One of them very quickly said, put me in charge, and gave this evil laugh, like, clearly we didn't choose her. So, he chose someone else, but even before we'd left the front door, we could hear this other one bossing their siblings around.

[8 : 13] I mean, we don't do well with ultimate power, do we? But here is Jesus as King with all power, and what does he do? He doesn't boss us around.

He takes off his outer garment or coat, as though he takes off his rank as King with all power, and then puts on a towel, a mark of a servant.

And then he washes his disciples' feet, which is the act of a servant. In fact, it was such a filthy job that they wouldn't even get Jewish servants to do it. They'd get the Gentile servants to do it if they could.

But here Jesus does it. It's an extraordinary act of humility and service, isn't it? I mean, can you imagine a powerful world leader doing this? You know, President Trump coming to our church, and we're lining up, and he washes all our feet.

Or the Queen going to Canada and washing Meghan Markle's feet. Is that still too contentious? I don't know if I should mention that. But here Jesus, the King, does it.

[9 : 14] You see, washing feet, this WF, is a symbol that symbolizes humble service. It shows Jesus is our servant King.

But like the story at the start, Peter misunderstands this symbol, and is horrified, like the lady was. So verse 6, over the page now. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

Jesus replied, you do not understand now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet.

Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part or fellowship with me. Now, it's in verse 6, how Peter rightly calls Jesus Lord.

He knows Jesus is the King. And I think he even understands that Jesus is acting like a servant. That's why he's horrified. What he doesn't yet understand, is why.

[10 : 20] And it's here, along with the introduction about Jesus' death, that helps us to see how Jesus humbly serves us. It's by dying to wash us clean, to cleanse us from sin, that we may have fellowship with him.

You see, it's not unclean feet that keeps us from fellowship with God. It's unclean hearts, isn't it? Therefore, it's our sin or moral filth, so to speak, that makes us unclean before God, and so unable to enter into fellowship with Christ now, or life eternal, in his Father's heavenly house, as Jesus will call it later in chapter 14.

It's why our first reading, that David, the psalmist, prays that he would be cleansed from sin. I must confess, I'm a bit of a clean freak.

I remember going camping when I was younger, and when I was 14, I think it was, and I actually packed a dustpan and broom with me. I should have realized I was not normal, when I saw I was the only person, 14 year old, to do this.

But I didn't like the sand in my tent, so I would brush it and clean it out, and I even told my mate, that he was not allowed in my tent, unless he took off his dirty shoes. And so he did.

[11 : 42] Well, we cannot enter God's heavenly tent, or house, if you like, not because of dirty shoes, but because of dirty hearts. And it's not because God is a clean freak, or has a bit of OCD, which I suspect I have, it's because God is holy.

And like oil and water cannot mix, so sin and holiness just cannot mix. It just doesn't happen. And yet God does not want us to miss out, on fellowship with Christ now, nor life eternal later.

And so Jesus willingly came, and loved us to the end. Not by washing us to cleanse our feet, but by dying for us to cleanse our hearts. To pay for our sins, so that God could forgive us, and wipe our slates clean, fresh start.

Free to have fellowship with Christ now, free to have eternal life. Now Peter doesn't understand, the cleansing part of the symbolism just yet.

Jesus says back in verse 7, that he will understand later. But Peter does understand the service bit, and the value of fellowship with Christ.

[12 : 55] Did you notice that Jesus said, in the end of verse 8, that unless I wash you, you can have no part with me. And then, then Lord Simon Peter replied, don't just wash my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

I mean, it's a bit of a silly response, but it's kind of nice, I think. He doesn't understand the symbolism of, being cleansed by his death yet, but he sure does get the value, of fellowship with Christ, doesn't he?

So much so, that he doesn't want to miss out on it. And I wonder, if we value fellowship with Christ, that much. You know, that we think being one of his people, is the best thing since sliced bread.

Such that we dread the thought, of missing out on it. And do we value our fellowship with Christ, this much, for all that it brings us, and gives to us?

Well, Peter assures, sorry, Jesus assures Peter, he won't miss out, because he's already clean. Have a look at verse 10. Jesus answered, those who have had a bath, need only to wash their feet.

[14 : 00] Their whole body is clean. And you, which is plural, you disciples, are clean, though not every one of you. Now, verse 10 is a little bit tricky, so stay with me, because it seems to be saying, Peter doesn't need his head, and hands washed, like he asks for, because he is already clean.

You see how Jesus says, you are clean. The disciples are, apart from one, which is Judas. But hang on a second, Jesus hasn't yet died, to cleanse them.

He hasn't even finished, washing their feet. And so, how can they already, be clean? Well, it's because, his death, in a few hours, can cleanse people, either in the past, or the future.

It works both, backwards and forwards. It's kind of like, a shadow, so we'll skip that one. A shadow, can be cast, either backwards, or forwards.

Well, so the cross, is effective, for people in the past, just like it's effective, for us, in the future. It's why the people, in the Old Testament, could be cleansed, by Christ's death, in the past, even though Jesus, had not yet died, for them in the present.

[15 : 18] You see, Jesus' death, was once, for all people, for all time, for all sins, past, present, and future. And so, Peter doesn't need, his head and hands, washed too, because Jesus' death, has already, cleansed his whole body.

He needs only, his feet washed, the WF symbol, to understand later, that Jesus, had to serve them, to cleanse them.

But if Jesus' death, can work backwards, then why is Judas, not clean? Well, because, for Jesus' death, to be effective, we must believe, the word about him, who he is.

That's John's purpose, remember, in writing this book, on the slide. He says, these things are written, this, I've given you this word, in my book, so that you may believe, Jesus is the Messiah, the King, and have life, be cleansed, in his name.

It's why, at the bottom of the slide, in a couple of chapters, Jesus will say to the disciples, you are already clean, not because I washed your feet, but because of the word, I have spoken to you.

[16 : 30] You see, Peter and the others, have believed the word, Jesus has spoken to them. And so, his death in a few hours, has already become effective, for them. They're already cleansed.

But Judas, is not, because he does not, it seems, believe the word, about Jesus. Whether it's because, he doesn't like the type of king, Jesus is, you know, serving others, or whether it's because, he's more interested in the money, remember a couple of weeks ago, we saw he used to skim the money, off the money bag, or whether it's both, we don't know.

But Peter's, and the others, are already clean, because they have believed, and Christ's death, is effective for them. And so, here is the next big application, for us. Not just do we value, Christ's fellowship, but firstly, have we been cleansed, by Christ?

Have we believed, the word about him?