

The Servant King

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[0 : 00] Well, an English lady wrote to a country inn in Switzerland, inquiring about some accommodation before all the rooms had en-suites.

So this was some time ago. And she included that she would like to be as close as possible to the WC, short for Water Closet, which in England means toilet.

But the Swiss innkeeper was not familiar with this symbol for toilet and thought WC referred to the Wayside Chapel, the 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.

But it's only open on Sundays. There are a great number of people expected in 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 would recommend your ladyship go in the morning where there is organ accompaniment. The acoustics are excellent and even the most delicate of noises can be heard.

[1 : 10] My wife, unfortunately, is not able to go regularly. It's been almost a year since she last went. And naturally, it pains her very much not to go more often. Sincerely, Frederick.

Now, as you can imagine, after reading this letter, the lady was horrified and booked elsewhere. But we can often misunderstand symbols, can't we? And today it's not the WC, but the WF, washing feet.

That is a symbol that we can misunderstand. And in fact, I think Peter already misunderstood it in our passage. You may have seen that before. But it's also misunderstood by some churches.

So some churches practice the actual ritual of foot washing or washing feet, like on the next slide. They do it especially on Thursday before Good Friday, because that's where we are in John chapter 13.

It's Thursday night before Jesus dies on Friday. In fact, one minister on the next slide has even posted some guidelines for a foot washing service. And so one of the guidelines on the next slide, it's a bit hard to see, but it says women are not to wear stockings or pantyhose, because it makes it difficult to wash their feet.

[2 : 24] And then on the next slide, he says for everyone, they are to wear clean feet and clean foot gear. And adding at the very end, it's a bit hard to see with the red lining. But although it is very biblical to wear open sandals, it isn't very edifying for the person doing the washing, he says.

But repeating it as a ritual, and even his comment about having clean feet, so it's nicer for the person doing the washing, misunderstands this symbol of WF, washing feet.

And because it's actually a symbol of humbly serving others out of love, not being edified yourself. And for Jesus, it's about humbly serving us as our servant king, who died to cleanse us from sin.

And so we're at point one in your outlines at the moment, which will be the longest point by far. And I doubt we'll get to point three, but we'll see. So verse one, chapter 13, verse one, John gives us an introduction to this washing of feet.

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 loved them to the end.

[3 : 44] Here, the context for this washing feet, this WF, is Jesus's death. And we can see it three ways in just verse one. At first, John points out it's just before the Passover festival.

Remember where they sacrificed a lamb? To remember how God saved them from Egypt, where they put blood on the door frames of their houses. And when the angel come to judge Egypt, the angel would see the blood and pass over their house.

And they would be saved. And remember who John has already identified as the lamb who would save us from sins? It's Jesus. On the next slide, he wrote at the very start of his gospel that Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And so here in chapter 13, the mention of the Passover is this subtle hint that Jesus is soon to die. But second and less subtly is that John tells us that Jesus' hour had come.

And last week, we saw the hour referred to the time he is glorified at the cross, where he reveals his glorious or great character for his love for us and so on.

[4 : 53] And to make it even clearer, John says in verse one there that the hour has come for Jesus to leave this world. Die. It's pretty clear, isn't it? Or be it for a couple of days before he rises again.

And thirdly, we're told that having loved his own disciples, he loved them to the end. Do you see? The word end can mean to the end of his own life. Or it can mean to the end of his own love.

That is, to show the full extent of his love. But either way, washing their feet, you know, that took place on the Thursday night is hardly the end of his life.

He's still got a few hours left. And washing their feet is hardly the full extent of his love, is it? But his death, that on the cross tomorrow, on that very first Good 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 so here, John is reminding us that the context is Jesus' impending death.

[6 : 02] And in case we're still not convinced, he adds in verse 2 that the evening meal, the Passover meal, was in progress. And the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

And Judas' betrayal will lead to Jesus' death, won't it? So here is another reminder.

In fact, the betrayal of Jesus runs like a thread throughout our passage, and then he's unpacked at the end. John is constantly reminding us that Jesus' death is in the background. It's imminent.

And all this helps us to understand that this washing feet, this symbol of WF, has something to do with Jesus' death. And what happens next helps us to make the connection, I think.

So verse 3. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

[7 : 03] In other words, about to die. 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.

Before you turn over the page, notice in verse 3 here that Jesus has all power. Do you see that? He is king over all. Can you imagine what you would do with that kind of power?

I remember one time we had to go out and leave one of our kids in charge. One of our children said, put me in charge. And then gave this evil love. Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho. And we said, no, definitely not you.

So he chose another one. But before we'd even left the house, that other one was bossing their siblings around. That's how we use ultimate power. But how does Jesus use it?

Well, he takes off his outer garment, his coat. As though he takes off his rank as king with all power. And he said, puts on a towel, a mark of a servant.

[8 : 12] And then washes his disciples' feet, which is the act of a servant. In fact, it was such a filthy job that it was deemed too dirty for Jewish servants.

And was reserved for Gentile servants, if they could help it. But here, Jesus, the one with all power, does it. It's an extraordinary act of humble service, isn't it?

That's what the symbol is about. Humble service, which, as we'll see in a moment, leads Jesus to die at the cross for us. I mean, can you imagine a powerful leader of our world doing what Jesus does here?

You know, President Trump coming to our church and washing our feet. Or the Queen going to Canada and washing Meghan Markle's feet. Is that too contentious?

Maybe that's too contentious. But here is Jesus, the king of all, washing his disciples' feet. This WF, this washing feet, is a symbol that shows humble service from our servant king.

[9 : 24] But like the story at the start, Peter misunderstands this symbol of WF. And so he's horrified. So pick it up at verse 6 over the page. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said, 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. Notice in verse 6, Peter rightly calls Jesus Lord.

He knows Jesus is king. And yet he understands enough to know that Jesus is acting like a servant here. But what he doesn't understand is why, what it all means.

Though Jesus says in verse 7, you'll understand later. And it's here, along with the introduction about Jesus' death, that helps us to see the connection.

[10 : 28] It helps us to see how Jesus will humbly serve us. And it's by dying to wash us, to cleanse us, so that we can have a part or have fellowship with him.

You see, it's not unclean feet that keeps us from fellowship with Christ, is it? It's unclean hearts. Our sin and moral filth makes us unclean before God and so unable to have fellowship with Christ now and unable to have life eternal in his Father's house, as Jesus will call it later.

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

And I remember going camping when I was younger, about 14 years old. And I actually packed a dustpan and broom in my luggage. I should have realized I was not normal when I was the only person to do this.

But I hated sand in my tent, so I'd sweep it and clean it out. I even told my friend that he was not allowed in my tent unless he took off those dirty shoes and then he was allowed in.

[11 : 42] Well, we cannot enter God's heavenly house because of our dirty hearts. But not because God is a clean freak like me, but because God is holy.

And just like oil and water cannot mix, so sin and holiness cannot mix. And yet because God does not want us to miss out on fellowship with Christ now, nor life eternal in his heavenly house later.

Then he sent his Son who 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 justly forgive us and wipe our slates clean. Free now to enter life eternal in his heavenly house.

Free to have fellowship with Christ. And so just as he puts aside his power as king to humbly wash their feet tonight, so he'll put aside his power as king to humbly die for them tomorrow.

[12 : 53] Now that's an extraordinary act of humility and love, isn't it? It is like Annette read at the start of the service on the next slide from Philippians 2.

What he's doing in taking off his outer cloak. It is like that, isn't it? He doesn't consider his glory as something to be used to his own advantage, but he takes it off and humbles himself and puts on the nature of a servant to die for us.

Now Peter doesn't understand the cleansing part of the symbolism just yet. Remember Jesus said he'll get it later. But Peter does understand at least the value of fellowship.

So verse 9, Jesus has said, Unless I wash you, you can have no fellowship with me. Then verse 9, Lord, Simon Peter replied, Not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

Now it's a bit of a silly comment, but it's also kind of nice, isn't it? He doesn't understand all the symbolism just yet, particularly the cleansing by death bit. But he gets the value of fellowship with Christ, doesn't he?

[13 : 57] And I wonder if we value fellowship with Christ that much. That we think being one of his people is the best thing since sliced bread.

That the thought of not having fellowship with Christ and the hope of eternal life would terrify us like it does Peter. Do we value our fellowship with Christ this much?

I found that a challenge actually, as I was thinking about it. But Jesus assures Peter he won't miss out on it, for he's already clean. Do you see verse 10?

Jesus answered, Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet. Their whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you.

Now this verse is a little bit tricky to understand. It seems to say that Peter doesn't need his head and his hands washed as well, because he is already clean.

[15 : 00] It's as though he's already had a bath. See how Jesus says, You are clean. The you there is plural. You disciples are all clean, except for one, Judas.

But hang on a second. Jesus hasn't died for them yet. He hasn't even finished washing their feet yet. So how can they already be clean? Well, because Jesus's death can cleanse people in the past, as well as the future.

The cross works both backwards and forwards. Like a shadow on the next slide, where the cross, depending on the time of day, can cast a shadow either backwards or forwards.

Christ's death was once for all time, for all people, for all sin. It's why people in the Old Testament were still cleansed by Christ's death, even though Jesus had not yet died for them.

And it's why we in the future can still be cleansed by Christ's death 2,000 years ago, because his death was once for all time, for all people, for all sins, past, present and future.

[16 : 10] And so Peter doesn't need his head and his hands washed too, because Jesus's death tomorrow has already cleansed his whole body tonight, that Thursday night. He needs only his feet washed, the WF symbol, so that he'll later remember Jesus is the servant king who died to cleanse him.

Now, hang on a second. If Jesus's death can work backwards, then why is Judas not clean too? Remember, he says, not every one of you is clean. Well, because for Jesus's death to be effective, we must believe the word about him, who he is.

Remember on the next slide, John's purpose statement, he wrote these things down. This word in our Bible, in John's gospel, is written so that we may believe the word about Jesus, that he is the Messiah or king.

And so we can have life or be cleansed in his name. It's why Jesus will say to his disciples a couple of chapters later, at the bottom of the slide there, you are already clean because of the, not the feet washing, the word I have spoken to you.

You see, Peter and the others have believed the word Jesus spoke to them about himself. And so Jesus's death tomorrow has already become effective for them tonight. They're already clean.

[17 : 31] But for Judas, having his feet, even though he's had his feet washed, he is not clean because he has not believed the word about Christ. Whether it's because he doesn't like the type of king Jesus is or because he's more interested in money.

Remember, he used to skim the money bag to help himself. Or both, we don't know. But Peter and the others are already clean because they have believed the word about Jesus and his death works backwards as well.

And so here's the next big application for us, I guess, is have we been cleansed by Christ? Have we believed the word about him? Such that we trust in him and his death to cleanse us from sin and give us life eternal with God.

Don't be a Judas who, you know, is here but refuses to accept the word about Christ because it means missing out on fellowship with him now and life eternal later.

I'd rather be a Peter who sees the value of fellowship with Christ and puts his trust in him. And for us who have, then do we realise what a comfort being clean actually is?

[18 : 43] As I said, I'm a bit of a clean freak and I love being clean. That's not what I mean. But do we realise what a comfort being cleansed by Christ is? It means we have permanent forgiveness every time we sin which is a great relief because we all still sin, don't we?

I mean, put up your hand if you never sin. Good. Well done. It's a great relief because it means we can have forgiveness every time we ask for it because Jesus' death has already paid for it.

We're already cleaning God's sight and because we're already cleaning God's sight now, then we can have great certainty of life eternal later. In a world where there is not much certainty, particularly with the coronavirus and so on, Jesus' once for all time death brings us great certainty and comfort.

Our future is secure, you see. But his humble service for us as our servant king also sets us an example to follow. So more briefly, point to verse 12.

When Jesus had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you?

[19 : 57] He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Now here is the second lesson from the symbol. And this is one that they can understand.

You see verse 12? Jesus assumes they can understand this bit. They won't understand how he dies to cleanse them from sin. They'll understand that later. But they can understand his act of humble service which they are to follow.

And so Jesus is not saying though that he wants them to actually wash one another's feet any more than he wants them to die for each other's sins.

No, no, remember it's a symbol of humble service. And that's why I didn't suggest that we do some feet washing today along with some massaging and so on.

[21 : 02] I'm sorry if you were looking forward to that. But because it is a symbol of humble service then you know what? We actually have seen it today. And we've seen it as people have served us whether welcoming us to church this morning or reading the Bible for us or leading the service for us or doing the sound and slide or the music for us.

That's how we wash one another's feet. By putting aside our preferences and putting on a towel and serving one another.

Not just through the formal roles during a Sunday service though but even behind the scenes during the week. And so for example I know of people who give up their times to help others move house when it comes up.

Others have served by caring for other families' children. Others invite people for lunch especially those who are single or widowed or new. I know of some who sit with disabled people to comfort them to give lifts to others who can no longer drive.

And of course our health can limit how we can serve and so for some who have bad health they ring people they notice are missing from church and even pray with them over the phone.

[22 : 15] That's how we wash one another's feet. I remember hearing a story of a 17 year old high school kid in the US who was really good at football I think it was and a local college coach came, saw and wanted to recruit him for the college team which always ended at the bottom of the ladder.

But the 17 year old refused to sign with this coach until the very end of the year. When he was asked why he did this he said to the coach lots of college coaches come and see me play each week but most of my teammates weren't getting scholarship offers or being recruited earlier this year but now they are.

By me not committing anywhere all the college coaches kept coming to see me play and also discovered how good my teammates really are.

If I signed with you early the coaches would not have come and my teammates would not have been recruited too. Isn't that a nice story? Here is a kid who put off his chance for glory to humbly serve his teammates and then signed with the team at the bottom of the ladder to help them anyway.

That's the kind of attitude we have towards our teammates here one another at church. Of course if you're anything like me then putting aside our preferences and putting on a towel of humble service is not always easy.

[23 : 46] Sometimes I find myself internally thinking oh do I have to again? I don't know if you've ever felt that or maybe it's just me. And if you do though then Jesus gives us a challenge and an encouragement to help.

First the challenge verse 16. Very truly I tell you no servant is greater than his master nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

In other words if a servant is not above their master and the master has served others well so too should the servant. It's not an optional extra for us you see.

If we think it's optional for us then we're saying we're above our master. We're saying we're better than Jesus but no servant is greater than their master and so if he served others then so too must we.

Again it depends on our life circumstances and our health and so on and opportunities but there are loads of ways even by just picking up the phone or talking with someone who's by themselves during morning tea.

[24 : 59] This is how we're to serve or wash one another's feet. And then comes the encouragement to do it. Verse 17 Now that you know or understand these things you will be blessed if you do them.

We are blessed not just understanding these things this example to follow but by doing it by following the example by serving one another brings blessing.

A blessing like satisfaction and joy in fact someone once said joy on the next slide stands for serving Jesus first others second then yourself last. Or as Jesus put it on the next slide from Acts chapter 20 he said it is more blessed to to give than to receive.

And we know this ourselves don't we? You know when there's a chance to serve others or to help someone out and we may think at the start oh do we really have to but then after we've done it we often feel good about it don't we?

There is this sense of satisfaction or joy that God gives us. And it's not just the blessing of satisfaction and joy it's the blessing of being known as one of his disciples as Jesus will say later in this chapter by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

[26 : 23] And so the second big application or the next big application for us is pretty clear isn't it? We must serve one another. And so how are you going at putting off your preferences and putting on the towel?

For those who already do then thank you for following in Christ's footsteps. It's brilliant. And for those of us who find it hard then look to our example to Jesus who humbly served us to death.

That we might not serve out of guilt but out of gratitude for our servant king. Well we don't have time to do point three. I encourage you to read it at home and see how Jesus is even though he's a servant he's still the king who's in control even of his betrayer.

Instead let me finish. symbols as I mentioned at the start like WC can be misunderstood can't they?

But this symbol of WF washing feet I hope you now clearly understand. It symbolises humble service out of love which meant for Jesus dying to cleanse us from sin and it means for us serving one another.

[27 : 44] And so now that you understand these things may you be blessed by doing them. Let's pray. Our gracious father we do thank you for this reminder this morning of Jesus who is our servant king.

I thank you that he humbly served us by dying at the cross to cleanse us from sin. Help us to have that same attitude of humble service that we might seek to serve one another in whatever way we can.

And we pray this for Jesus sake. Amen.