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# The King who serves

## John 13:1-17

Dan Turner

### Introduction

*a tail of two dogs<sup>1</sup>*

*Once upon a time, there was a dog that lived in a sprawling house in the middle of the city. Though the house had plenty of doggie toys and room for play, the city dog hated the house. Day after day, it looked out the window and past the fenced-in yard to the street where he thought he would find his treat. The dog's focus was single. Staring at the closed door and drawn curtains the miserable dog felt stuck.*

*Every evening, the city dog anxiously awaited the arrival of its master – not because it loved the master but because the master's arrival provided an opportunity for escape. As soon as the dog heard the master's keys jingle outside the door, it attempted a mad dash out of the house and into the yard. But without fail the good master, with a pained expression of displeasure, made sure the dog stayed inside where no harm might befall it. Dejected the dog's tail would fall and retreating to a corner of the house and it started all over again plotting the escape. The City Dog.*

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*A dozen miles away, there was another dog. This dog lived in a one-room house set on a sprawling country farm. At one edge of the farm's borders was a cliff overlooking a rushing river. On the other side was a dark forest. But no fences were present. The country dog was free to roam the farm, but it usually preferred to stay close to the front porch. It worried that if it strayed too far, it might miss its master's arrival.*

*Every evening, the master's arrival was the highlight of the country dog's day. As soon as the master came into view, the dog's tail looked like a windshield wiper on a rainy day. Skipping and jumping and playing it followed close behind him, wanting to get into the house for no other reason but simply because it was where the master lived. Each day without fail, the master showered his love and affection on the country dog and then led it inside the tiny farmhouse, where the endless tail wagging occurred. Due to the master's love the outside world held no power of attraction over the happy country dog.*

**The point is simple.** *In the midst of pressures and pleasures growth in loyalty to the Master does not take place when our focus is only on restrictions. Feeling the love of the Master fuels love for the Master. And this we sense as we open our Bibles to John 13.*

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from modern-day parables by Trevin Wax. The essence of the parable remains the same. I took liberty however to shape it to fit John 13:1-17.

Over these last 8 months, Pastor Russ has taken us through the Gospel of John. Last week he finished preaching the first half of the book of John. We've noticed out of chapters 5-12 sparks flying as conflict increases as some believe and others reject Jesus' teaching and miracles. This week in John 13 Jesus turns now and focuses primarily on his own disciples. They are about to face Jesus' departure and then go into a hostile world where pain and temptations and suffering and betrayals and denials and defections occur. How will they stay the mission and not veer from the course? What will prepare his disciples for their intimidating tomorrows?

Jesus lays the groundwork for all this by doing three things.

1. He *explains* something to them (13:1-17). Today
2. He *expects* something of them (13:18-38). 16<sup>th</sup>
3. He *extends* something for them (14:1-11). 23<sup>rd</sup>

Today's message is titled *The King who Serves*. We will listen to v1-5 read and then ask him for help to understand his word.

*Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 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, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 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.* **PRAY**

## When the King serves

## v1a

To prepare his disciples for his departure Jesus explains what his departure means. We understand him doing this as we notice when the king serves.

### Before the Feast of the Passover...

First, "before the feast of the Passover". Now why is it important that the reader knows this?

The most memorable and oldest of the sacrificial feasts of Israel was the Passover; a vivid feast playing out God's way of delivering his people out of bondage into glorious freedom.

The Passover goes back to the days of Israel's slavery in Egypt. The Jews were under the cruel law of Pharaoh. He had them whipped and in forced labor. They cried to God and God heard them. He reminded them of his promise to Abraham that he would deliver his people with "an outstretched arm". To accomplish this deliverance he told his people to have a feast in which a flawless male lamb would be killed, eaten and the blood of the lamb would be smeared on the doorposts and lintel of their homes. No harm would come to them hidden behind the blood.

While they were observing the feast, the angel of God passed over them and killed the first born of every Egyptian family. God's people were saved from death by the death of the lamb and were led to the Promised Land through the water and by His word.

### **When His hour had come**

Secondly, we notice when the king serves as we observe the phrase *when his hour had come*. "Hour" is a common term John has used throughout his book. Yet if you were to read the first twelve chapters, you would continually see that John says, "His hour had not yet come" (2:4; 7:30; 8:20). Hour does not refer to a literal 60 min. period of time. Rather it points to the eve of the crucifixion. Christ was about to be crucified and He knew it. That is a very important point because this whole event of foot washing needs to be seen with this in mind. When did Christ serve his disciples? Just hours before his death – death on a cross.

### **What the King serves**

**v1b**

Having noticed when Jesus served his disciples the passage now takes us to what he actually served when he served them. Don't miss this point. This scene is not about foot washing merely. It is not about customs and rites. No this passage, this activity was to serve something to his disciples that would keep them from the evil one, that would safeguard them to the end, that would preserve them for himself for all eternity. What was this gift that would grip them to the end?

### **His full and forever love**

At the end of v1 we come to the main sentence. We read, "He loved them to the end". This sentence can mean he loved them until the end his life. But the Greek word for "end" can also mean "completely" or "fully". The context points to the second interpretation. The sentence probably should be better translated, "He loved them fully/completely" = to this extent!

He will explain what full love means in this passage. But suffice it to say Jesus was preparing his disciples for what lay ahead by communicating his full and forever love for them. Written on the backdrop of Passover; the redemption of God's people we read "he loved them to the full extent.

What Jesus is about to do in the following verses has to do with explaining this full and forever love for his own.

### **How the King serves**

**v2-4**

How Jesus served his disciples in order to communicate his gospel is simply staggering. V2-4 can hardly be expounded. The picture is to puncture any resistance his people may have to his leadership; a leadership that takes him and them into death.

### **In authority**

**v2-3**

Notice two things about this picture of Christ's servanthood. First, in v2-3 we find his authority. Jesus knows what is happening. His status is made known (he came from the Father and he goes back to the Father). His power is made known (all things have been

given into his hands). What would you expect him to do with such authority and power? Defeat the devil and his puppet Judas with a blast of wrath? Look at v4-5 and notice what his all-powerful hands find to do.

### In humility

**v4-5**

To show his full love for them Jesus explains his impending departure by humbly washing their feet. The task of foot washing was assigned to the lowliest of slaves. Never would a peer do this for a peer let alone a superior provide this for the common. In this scene Jesus reverses normal roles and takes up the basin and towel to perform the most menial of tasks. And all this for what?

### Why the King serves

**v6-17**

So in summary v1-5 is about the when, what and how Jesus served his disciples. This was to communicate his love for them to the end. But what does Christ's love for his own truly mean? Everyone has an opinion over how God is supposed to love them. But what does the Bible say about the love of God?

Let's take the passage personally and ask this question: How do you know God loves you? And if you were convinced of it, what difference would it make in your life?

The first question is answered in v6-11. The second question is answered in v12-17.

### His washing of their feet

**v6-11**

Jesus' lowly servanthood as seen in foot washing answers to things; 1) how God loves His people and 2) what difference it is to make in their lives.

### An example of spiritual cleansing

First it communicates spiritual cleansing. Listen as I read v6-11.

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

With their leader down on the floor washing their feet the disciples were uncomfortable to say the least. They do not yet understand how their messiah must go to the cross. Hardly then can they understand that this act anticipates it.

What was their reason for remaining silent? Were they embarrassed? Was an awkward self-consciousness keeping their mouths shut? I don't know. But I do know that when silence fills the air and Peter is around things change. .

In verses 6-11 we see Jesus coming to Peter to wash his feet. It is obvious from what Jesus says to Peter that this washing needs to be received in humility and by faith. How does Peter respond? "Are YOU going to wash MY feet"? He goes on to say, "NO you will not wash my feet".

Peter's failure to understand is typical of the disciples prior to Christ's death and resurrection. They took all things literally. They reasoned on a level no higher than the norms of the day. To think that the one they venerated would take on the form of a bondservant and do a menial task for them...well this shocked their senses. Jesus response is both marvelous and frightening.

Jesus reveals what the act of foot washing represented. It was a *spiritual cleansing*. He said, "if I do not wash you, you have no share with me". The marvelous truth revealed to his disciples is the fact that Jesus does wash his people. And his people have a share with him. This means through Christ's death on the cross his blood figuratively washes his people spotless. They are clean. And as a result, they have an eternal inheritance in/with Christ. Those washed by the blood of the Lamb are clean and belong to Jesus!

The frightening aspect to this truth is also played out. If you are not washed by Jesus (think Judas) you are not clean. You do not have a share in Christ. You belong to the night.

Well Peter changes his gears and now with unrestrained joy he unthinkingly blurts out "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well".

This response led Jesus to apply the foot washing in a slightly different direction. In v6-8 the Footwashing symbolizes the cleansing that came from Christ's crucifixion and following resurrection. V9 provides the opportunity to direct the Footwashing toward a different application. The teaching of V10-11 is similar to 1John 1:9 "that if you confess your sins he is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness". In Christ we are utterly clean due his atoning sacrifice on the cross. And yet we walk the dusty road of life still sinning and still in need of confession and freshly applied forgiveness. This is the center of what it means to have God love you. The accomplishment of Christ's sacrificial atonement applied to you by faith in him makes you clean. Though you will sin, you are clean and therefore wash up regularly through confession, repentance and acceptance of his Cross work.

### **Their washing of each other's' feet**

**v12-17**

Coming out of washing their feet he looks at them to say (read v12-17)

*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? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 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. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

## An example of serving one another

Here we see in these verses what the foot washing also communicates. It communicates humble service & love for the members of Jesus new community (think: local church).

We are not to think of this as literal and ongoing washing of each others' feet. Rather we are to think of the profound meaning and wondrous application of Christ's cleansing work on our behalf. We are to be so moved by Christ's love demonstrated on the Cross that we will serve each other even when the tasks are menial and servant-like.

Gladly taking the lower role because we are clean in Christ we desire to serve and suffer for God's people. Listen beloved. Christian enthusiasm due to God's love that does not joyfully and humbly serve others sounds shallow and looks pathetic.

Here in v12-17 we have the effects of the cleansing power of the gospel. It makes us into glad hearted and humble servants of one another. This prepares Christ's church for what lies ahead – a world that hates Christ and his people.

In conclusion... (probing the following questions to apply the truth of the message)

What does this text do to your heart?

**Conclusion**

Do you believe God loves you only through his sacrificed Son?

Do you feel this love to the extent that you humbly and happily serve His people?

Calling you to Christ & each other.



**Title**

**Text**

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## **Introduction**

## **Heading**

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## **Conclusion**