



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 13: 1-17

Winter 2023

"The Servant King"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Seth. We are beginning a new section of the Gospel of John this morning. We're in Chapter 13 and today we'll be looking at verses 1-17,

13 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."

¹²So 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?" ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶Truly, 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. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

John 13: 1-17

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You that You are all powerful; You are the God of creation, and the God of salvation; You are the Almighty, full of compassion and loving-kindness toward Your people. And so, You've invited us, (as the author of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 4, *(verse 16)*, 'Come boldly before the throne of grace in time of need'), to seek help at that place of grace—that's Your throne.

So, we enter into Your throne room at this moment and we pray for ourselves in this hour. We pray that You would bless us with understanding, that You would open our minds; that the Holy Spirit would open those minds and teach us and make the applications that we need here. One great application is obvious—that we, whoever we are, are to be servants of one another: To serve You and serve one another. May we understand that and do it—not only know it, but do it. So we pray, LORD, that You would give us understanding and You would give us action.

So bless us as we study together. May this not only be a time of study, but through study, may it be a time of worship. May we reverence You and love You as we read these great words of Scripture, and ponder this great act that the Lord engaged in at that Passover meal.

And we pray for our material needs as well, LORD, and again we thank You for the answered prayers that we see here with us this morning. You know the needs of every one of us and we pray that You would make us very much aware; that You are very much aware of where we are in life and what we need—and You are supplying it and You will care for us.

We pray for the women; that You would bring them home safely today, and bless the time that they will spend together before they leave.

And bless us now, LORD, as we sing our next hymn. Use that to prepare our hearts for a time of study together. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) People often like to claim a word, or phrase, for their motto—a slogan that expresses their character or their principle of conduct. Schools have mottoes. Clans and royal families have mottoes.

The motto of the Prince of Wales is, "I serve." That's a good motto. In fact, I can't think of a better one. But of all the princes and kings of this world who have served and served well, none has lived up to that like "the King of kings and Lord of lords", the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul spoke of that in Philippians chapter 2. He wrote that, 'Although He existed in the form of God, He took the form of a servant', (vs6&7), and "...humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (vs8). That was the greatest act of service. And He gave a foreshadowing of it on the night of the Passover, when He got up from the table, knelt down and washed the dusty feet of His disciples.

That is how the next major division of the Gospel of John begins, chapters 13 through 17. It's known as the *Upper Room Discourse*, or 'The Farewell Discourse', that ends with Jesus' longest prayer; and it is unique to the Gospel of John. Matthew has 11 verses on the Lord's instruction that night. Mark, 10 verses; Luke 25 verses. John has five chapters, counting the prayer of John 17.

The other Gospels record Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper that night. John has nothing on that. Instead He spoke about His departure, His death. He spoke of God the Father and the Holy Spirit; about the spiritual life and bearing fruit. He spoke of personal peace and Christian love. In fact, 'love', especially—it's in every chapter. The discourse begins with love and it ends with a prayer for love: 'That the love of the Father, the love that the Father has for Him, the Son, would be in His disciples.' (Jn 17:26).

It all sounds very contemporary and popular. —It's what people today say the world needs; "Love, sweet love." But the love the Lord speaks of is hard love; it's difficult love. It's the love of sacrifice and service. So He introduced this great and glorious discourse with a demonstration of love—one these disciples never forgot.

No one was more qualified to give a demonstration of it than the Lord Jesus Christ. "...Having loved His own who were in the world," John wrote, "He loved them to the end." (vs1b). Faithful to the end. And the end had come.

Jesus knew that; the nation had rejected Him. John prepared us for that in chapter 1; he wrote, Jesus "came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (vs11). And so, the next few hours that remained before His arrest and crucifixion He concentrated on the few who had received Him, those who are now called "*His own*". What a privilege. There's no greater privilege than to be *His own*. And we who put our faith in Him are as much 'His own' as those disciples were. He came to that hour and went to the cross for us, as much as for them.

So this discourse is as much to us as it was to them. He is speaking to us here. And having loved you while you are in this world, He will love you to the end, and He will bring you through to the end, and into eternity.

Now this discourse itself is an example of His selfless love. John said, 'He knew His hour had come.' (vs1a). He knew His time was short, that He would soon die a cruel death. Yet He spent that time, not thinking so much of Himself, but with them— thinking of them, teaching them, preparing them.

And He introduced His instruction with this amazing act of selfless, humble service when He got up from the Passover meal to get down on His knees and wash their feet. All 12 of them, even the feet of Judas Iscariot, (whom John reminds us was there while conspiring to kill Him). "The devil," John wrote, 'had already put it in his heart' "to betray Him." (vs2).

The Lord, "...loved His own who were in the world", (1b), John said. But they were not of the world—Judas was. And his conduct reveals the very nature of the world, (which is in stark contrast to Christ), for the world looks out for itself first. Men seek to exalt themselves, even at the expense of others; while Christ humbles Himself and serves.

And He did so, knowing full well who He is. 'He knew', John wrote in verse 3, "that the Father had given all things into His hands." He knew His awesome authority as the Son of God—He knew all things. Well, when He says this, "the Father had given all things into His hands", think of the text that Alan just taught an hour before. Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 20: Who is this Son of God? 'He is eternal.' 'He's before all things.' 'He created all things.' 'He sustains all things', "holds everything together" —and Christ knows that. He knows who He is; knows that God has put everything "into His hands."

And so, nevertheless, fully aware of this, fully aware of who He is, John wrote in verse 4 that Jesus, "got up from the supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself." The King of kings, dressed Himself like a household servant and began to do the work of a servant. "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." (vs5).

Now it's hard for us to understand the impression that must have made on the disciples. We're so familiar with this event that it's acceptable to us—but it wasn't to the disciples. Teachers; rabbis were men of great authority. They didn't do things like this;

this was slave work! This was beneath the dignity of a 'Teacher.' It was reserved for the lowliest of menial servants.

In fact, some in that day insisted that Jewish servants should not be required to wash the feet of other Jews; that was reserved for Gentile slaves. So when Jesus began this menial task, this humble act, they were shocked...they were speechless. It wasn't humble to them, it was humiliating—it was scandalous.

I had an experience a number of years ago that gave me some slight appreciation for what happened that night, not from foot washing, but shoe shining. I was in New York City, in the office of a brokerage firm. It was high up, next to the World Trade Center, (which tells you how long ago this was). It looked out on the Hudson Bay at the Statue of Liberty. It was an impressive place, filled with investors sitting at their computers, watching the numbers from The Stock Exchange going across the screen, and talking on the telephone. —Busy people.

I was there visiting a friend, (and had some time before leaving for the airport), so I just observed what was happening. This was a completely different world from what I was used to and found it very interesting. I was behind a young, well dressed guy, a friendly guy, who had recently graduated from a school up east. He was working at his computer when another young man came in to shine his shoes. The broker scolded him for being late, went back to trading stocks, dealing in millions of dollars, and didn't give the man toiling with his shoes another thought—he was an invisible man to him.

What chance was there, I wondered, of that young broker getting up from his desk, taking off his tie, rolling up his sleeves, and getting down and shining that other young man's shoes? Or any of his coworkers? —None! No more than the disciples would have washed one another's feet; they were too dignified to do that; they were too important for that.

In fact, Luke records, (Luk 22:24), that when the supper began, they were arguing over which one of them was the "greatest", and would be 'greatest in the kingdom', which they anticipate coming very soon. They were full of self-importance.

And so, the Lord took the place of the servant, (or the shoe shine man). He did for them what they should have done for Him, and He began to wash their feet. It was an act of service.

But it was more than that, much more than that: It was an *illustration*, or better, *a parable*, in which He acted out the service He would perform for us on the cross in His work of salvation.

And Paul saw that. He wrote, in Philippians chapter 2, verses 6 and 7, "Although He existed in the form of God...*He* emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant." We see that here; He got up from the supper. He got up from the place of preeminence, (there at the table), and He left the place of preeminence. —And He did that at the incarnation; He left His throne of glory.

In the upper room, He "laid aside His garments." (vs4). And Paul says that, 'When He came into this world He *laid aside* His glory'; He "emptied Himself." (Col 2:7). He made Himself of no account; no importance. And he did that by "taking the form of a bond-servant". And here we read that, 'He took a towel and He girded Himself.' He dressed Himself as a household slave. Then He did the work of a servant, washing the disciples feet with water—a picture of what He would do a few hours later, when He shed His blood on the cross and washed away our sins. All of that was being illustrated in the Lord's humble act of service.

But the disciples understood none of this when it happened. They were reclining on palates around the table, leaning on one arm with their feet extended out, away from the table, and very uncomfortable with what was taking place; watching in stunned silence as Jesus began His work. They didn't know what to say. They didn't know how to react.

Then Peter broke the silence and spoke his feelings when Christ came to him. He objected, "Lord" he said, "do you wash my feet?" (vs6). It was an expression of disbelief. The Lord explained to him that 'he didn't understand, but that he would later', (referring to the time after the resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit, when things would

become clear, and they would become known). In the meantime, He told Peter he needed to submit in faith, to just trust Him.

[Now that's good counsel for us, by the way. We don't always understand everything we read in the Bible. We don't understand everything that we hear in a sermon. Some of it may trouble us a bit. What we're to do is not reject it because we don't get it at the time. We don't reject it because we have to struggle with it for a while. We pray about it. We wait upon the LORD, and we know that He will give us understanding.]

But we know this: That, if it's His word, if it's there, it's true, and it's to be trusted and believed. And that's what the Lord was really instructing Peter to do: 'Be patient, you'll understand it. Trust Me, just wait.' But that wasn't good enough for Peter; he could only see the Lord's act in a social sense, not a spiritual one. And to Peter it was beneath the Lord's station—and completely unthinkable.

So he continued to protest; verse 8, "Never shall you wash my feet." It was well meant, (for Peter was speaking in a spirit of humility and reverence), but it's been pointed out that whatever humility he had, he had enough pride to dictate to the Lord, the Son of God. And unintentionally, he was stating that, 'He didn't need the washing that only Christ can give.' He was denying his need of Christ's purifying, atoning ministry.

And so the Lord calmly, but firmly, replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me", (vs8b), meaning: 'No communion—no fellowship, no part in My ministry, Peter, and no part in the atoning work that I will accomplish.'

Well, that got Peter's attention, and so he said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head", (vs9), 'Wash me all over!' Peter's like a pendulum—he swung from one extreme to the other. He truly loved the Lord but he lacked understanding. So the Lord again corrected him, patiently, and replied that that was not necessary; "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean." (vs10a).

The picture here is taken from the Orient and the custom of the day; when before going to another person's home for dinner, the guest would first bathe completely. But as he walked along the road, his open sandals would pick up dust, and

he would arrive with dusty feet that needed to be washed. Not the whole body, just his feet. And the servant there in the house would do that.

Well that's a picture of the Christian. The believer in Jesus Christ has bathed completely. We have been justified once and for all, completely forgiven of our sins; past, present, and future. We don't need to be born again all over again. We can't be—the new birth is a one time, forever event.

But, we are still in this world and need daily cleansing from the defilements of sin that we pick up in our walk through this world, in order to have an open and free fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Lord God, with the Triune God.

That occurs through sanctification, which also is part of the redemption that the Lord accomplished on the cross. It's the Lord's continual ministry of cleaning us up, of renewing our souls, of giving us spiritual growth and understanding—and a desire for holiness, a desire to live for Him and growing in that. For our part, that comes through continual study; it comes through obedience; and it comes through regular confession of sin, as in 1 John 1:9.

The child of God doesn't hide his or her sins from the Lord, but confesses them to Him. That is characteristic of a vital relationship with the Lord; it is open and earnest and honest. And that's what the Lord was requiring of Peter. And of us because every day we come in contact with the defilements of the world and we're soiled by sin. We are, as the reformers put it, "righteous sinners."

We're righteous, we're forgiven because of the cross. That's justification. But we still have sin within us and we have to deal with that. We must deal with it and deal with it immediately, and not allow it to take root in our hearts; to become a habit of life within us. And so to do that, we look to the Lord. We live in submission to the Lord. We live in submission to His Word, walking daily and walking openly, honestly with the Lord.

And so a complete bath was not necessary. Peter and all of the disciples were "...clean...", the Lord assured them, but then added, "...but not all *of you*." (vs10b).

He was speaking of Judas, who though a disciple, one of the twelve, had never been regenerated, had never been born again, and had never really trusted in Christ.

Now that's a sobering thought, (and we're not going to spend time reflecting on it too much), but it is a sobering thought. A person could be with the Lord for so many years, associated with believers—and not be one. The Lord was making it clear here that He knew what was happening in the room that evening—and it's very clear that He's in complete control. Satan is there; as someone put it, 'he's in the shadows there.' But Christ is in control.

Now following this conversation with Peter, He again took His place at the table. He dressed with His garment, and took that position of *preeminence*—and that completes the parable. Paul wrote, in Philippians chapter 2, verse 9, that following the Lord's obedience to the cross itself, "God highly exalted Him." And from His throne, He is now teaching His church.

And here He began to explain to them, (there at the table, that place of *preeminence*), what He had just done. He asked, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (vs12b). Then, in verse 13, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."

Now that doesn't mean to literally wash the feet of others. Some have understood it that way. There are denominations that practice foot washing. Nothing wrong with that at all. But it's unlikely that that was what the Lord intended here—that He intended that His act become an ordinance of the church; along with baptism and the Lord's Supper.

One reason I say that is, nowhere else in the New Testament is it treated as an ordinance of baptism. And secondly, I think the most important point here of the Lord's instruction, is not to follow this particular act literally—but what was behind it. The instruction is that of *humility*. He was directing them to serve others in a variety of ways—and genuine service begins in the heart. Enthusiasm for the Lord's work,

(whether it is winning souls, or it's teaching the Word of God, or it's helping the saints in material ways), is empty if it is done in pride. The Lord desires a humble heart; He desires that we serve others out of love for Him, and love for them. That's the motivation for doing what we do.

What He did in washing His disciple's feet was an example; it was an illustration of service. We are to be humble; we are to take the servant's role. He reinforced that with the statement that, 'If He, the Master, the Teacher, whom they all recognized as the Lord, if He did this, how much more should they do it?'

Who are His servants? Serving people is broad in its scope and activity. It's helping people in the material matters of life, it's helping them in spiritual issues; in understanding the Word of God and understanding how it applies; in untangling people from difficulties. It's in restoring those who have fallen into sin. There's all kinds of ways to help; the list of things are endless.

The Lord didn't go into the details about how we are 'to wash one another's feet', so to speak, 'how we're to shine one another's shoes', so to speak; the 'how' we are to serve. What He did is He gave a principle of conduct in His example that applies very broadly. What He did to was affirm that, 'His example is to be followed, and that following it is the way to happiness, is the way to joy; it's the way to fulfillment.'

Verses 16 and 17, "Truly, truly I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

All of this, selfless service, is contrary to human nature, (that is to natural human nature), and the way that the world works, (which is not working in a way that serves but is seeking to be served). That's the world. It doesn't seek to serve—it seeks you to serve it.

Well, the Lord recognized that. He began His instruction with "Truly, truly", in other words, 'Take note of this. This is something true, this is something that you must

understand.' "Truly, truly"—'Believe what I say', and follow Him in His example of service.

When they entered the upper room, they were thinking about ruling the world. They were thinking about 'being great and being served.' And now the Lord was telling them, the way to real fulfillment, real blessing, is through serving. And He not only taught it, He did it. He is the perfect servant; He is the sovereign servant; He is '*the servant King.*'

It sounds like a contradiction: 'A King who serves.' But that's what He was, that's what He is; 'He came into this world to serve, not to be served.' (Mat 20:28). And He did it wisely, and graciously, and *naturally*. I underscore that word, *naturally*. That night, in the upper room, there was a real need—there was a genuine *need*. This event wasn't manufactured by Him: They entered the room, their feet were dirty, and His feet were dirty. They were dusty and there was no servant there to clean them.

So He saw the *need*. He seized the opportunity and He did it; He did it Himself. He ignored His needs, and He met theirs—and He did it gladly. Not grudgingly; He did it gladly. It was a solemn moment, because more was happening there than washing. But He was eager to do it for them; that was His heart—to serve those He loved.

And when we become like Him, then we will love like He loved. We will serve one another naturally, gladly. We will see opportunities, and we will take those opportunities and be a blessing. And in being a blessing, we will be blessed.

"Truly, truly", He said, because again, it's not *natural* to do that. Our inclination is to consider our personal interests as more important than the interests of others: 'That just seems right; that seems smart; it's to live for self, and have everything orbit around our lives.' And that does result in some personal gains, and personal advantages in this life. —But none of them are full, and none of them are lasting.

James Boice illustrated this from astronomy. In the early days, before Copernicus, the model of the universe was based on the *Ptolemaic system*, which imagined the

world as the center of things. The Sun and the planets revolved around the earth. It was a *geocentric* system, instead of a *solar* system. (You all know this, I know.) It wasn't completely deficient: It could predict somethings, like sunrise and sunset, and new moons, and to some extent the course of the planets.

But it was not always accurate. And in attempting to adjust the system in order to chart the planets, the system broke down. It didn't allow for progress. All the new discoveries that were made, always went against it and proved it wrong.

The difficulty with the system was its first principle. The Sun, as we well know, not the earth, is the center of the system. We exist in a *solar system*. When that was learned, there were new discoveries, and progress was made. The universe opened up.

We find a parallel to that in our lives. Those who live as though they are the center of their personal universe, may have some results, some personal pleasures, some measure of security, some measure of happiness. They may gain wealth, position, prominence, and pleasures in life, as I said. They will, actually—but nothing that will last. Eventually that way of life breaks down: And happiness, fulfillment eludes them.

It's when God's grace corrects them, corrects us, and they understand that their lives orbit around Christ, the Son, the S-O-N, then they live in reality, live a life the way it is intended to be lived. Then life opens up for them, and they are blessed, and blessed in time—and for all eternity.

Christ is Lord, and He is *law*; He is *law* for us. And a fruitful life can only be lived in obedience and submission to Him, as after His example of service in a selfless life. The Scott, Robert Murray M'Cheyne, said it very well. "It is not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus." That should be our desire.

The greatest *motivation* for that is not happiness, joy...(we're talking about that; that's the result of living as Christ instructs us to live)...but the greatest *motivation* for that is not our personal happiness, but the sacrifice and service that He, Christ, made for us, when the day after He washed their feet, His feet were nailed to a cross and washed in blood.

John wrote, in Revelation chapter 1, verses 5 and 6, that He, "loosed us..." (or "released us"), "...from our sins by His blood, and made us *to be* a kingdom of priests." Kings, priests—but also servants: And chiefly servants in this world. That's what the world should see in the church, and in us personally. And we can be that because we are His own. He bought us. He is with us. He's in us. His life is in us, and He is changing us, supernaturally, (the sanctification).

So, do you belong to Him? Do you know that you are one of His own? You are if you have believed in Him, if you have seen yourself as a sinner in need of a cleansing; seen yourself as a sinner in need of a Savior, and have trusted in Him, and in Him alone.

If you have not believed in Him, well the greatest service I can do for you is urge you to see yourself as you are: In need of cleansing, in need of the Savior, in need of His blood—and trust in Him, trust in His sacrifice. Don't trust in your good deeds and accomplishments. Good deeds are important, but they don't buy us forgiveness and life. Only Christ's death can do that. And we lay hold of His death, we lay hold of His sacrifice, we lay hold of His life and make it our own, through faith in Him.

So look to Him, and receive from Him *eternal life*, new life. And then, in that new life, make your motto to be, "I serve." May God help us all to do that.

Father, we thank You for that death and that sacrifice we just sang about, and what we have considered in this lesson, and all that You've done for us. What a great service it was: No greater service than that that took place on the cross, and was pictured in that humble act of foot washing.

Thank You that You have included us in that sacrifice. Thank You that we are chosen from the foundation of the world, and Christ came and purchased us, and we are not a little group of people, a chosen few, for there is a vast multitude of those that You set Your love upon. And when we were dead and unable to come to You, You brought us

to life, and brought us to faith, and brought us into this great position we're in: 'Servants of the King! We are His own.'

Help us to live in that light of being His own, purchased by Him— and servants. May we imitate Him. May we truly live in that way toward one another and others. And we pray these things in Christ's name.

And now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace.

(End of Audio)