

# The Servant, The Symbol, & The Standard

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of the 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 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.

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 afterwards you will understand.

Simon 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.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] Jesus said to him, the one who is 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's why he said, not every one of you are clean, not all of you are clean. 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 am I am. If I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I've given you an example that you should also should do as I have done to you. 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. Oh, man. May God bless the reading of his word.

[ 2 : 0 7 ] Well, famous last words throughout history, people have paid special attention to the things that people have said in the last moments of their life.

That's often because in life we often waste our words. We say things very, we just waste our words. We use our words quickly. But in the last moments of people's lives, they often, people choose their words more carefully.

And we tend to focus on what people say. They tend to focus on what really matters. And if that's true for words, that's equally if not more true for actions.

What a person does in their final year of life, in their final month of life, in their final week of life shows what they really value, shows what matters, shows who they really value.

And as we work our way through John's Gospel, the clock has been beginning to wind down for Jesus. For the first 11 chapters, we heard a constant refrain from Jesus saying, my hour is coming.

[ 3 : 10 ] This event is coming, but it's not yet come. And then in chapter 12, verse 23, we turn to corner as Jesus announced, my hour has come. What hour? Well, it's the hour that Jesus goes on to say when he'll be lifted up from the earth, when he'll gather all people to himself, what he's talking about is his crucifixion, his death.

And his death is fast approaching. By the time we get to chapter 13, it's just in just 48 hours time, Jesus will be, his body will be in a tomb, cold and lifeless.

Jesus knows the end is coming. Our passage begins with those words, verse 13, Jesus says now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to depart from this world to the Father.

Jesus knows that the hour has come. And so what does he do? What does he do with these last 24 hours? He gets on his knees and he starts washing the disciples feet.

Final actions matter. They show us what really matters. So we need to ask ourselves, why does Jesus wash his disciples feet? Why now? We need to pay attention to that answer.

[ 4 : 22 ] Why does he wash his disciples feet? Well, I've got three reasons for you that I hope to leave you see from the passage. And happily they all begin with S. The servant, the symbol and the standard.

First the servant. On the eve of his death, Jesus washes his disciples feet to reveal to them the kind of King he is and the kind of death he's going to die.

He's revealing both his person and his work, both his identity and his purpose in ministry. So first his person. Jesus reveals what kind of King he is.

Now, monarchs throughout the ages are known for having large armies of servants, as it were. Some of you may remember the scene from the film Cleopatra. This is back in the day with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.

When Cleopatra comes into Rome and there's a huge number, hundreds of servants pulling this giant sphinx that she's riding upon. She has thousands of servants.

[ 5 : 22 ] Being Louis XIV of France who built the palace of Versailles, it was said to have 3,644 servants at the height of his reign there.

The pattern of this world is simple. The greater you are, the more servants you have. You have servants to drive you around, lay out your curros, apparently squeeze out your toothpaste if you read some of the tabloids about our royal family and pick up the things you drop.

The greater you are, the more servants you have. Jesus is a king. We heard that shouted out in chapter 12 as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey as people lined the streets.

They wanted a king who would give them independence from the Romans, but Jesus is far greater than just the military general. In verse 3, we read that Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into his hands.

Every country, every government, every people group, every person, everything that inhabits the created universe from a slug to a supernova, all things were given into Jesus' hands.

[ 6 : 33 ] Every person in Carloy, all the 4 million people packed on top of each other in the slums of Manila, all the people on the Gaza Strip, all the people in Israel, every single hair on our heads, Jesus knows because all things have been given to him.

Jesus pulled right to the Colossians in chapter 1 verse 16. He says, for by him, that is by Jesus, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

Jesus is the divine king of all creation. As the apostle John sees in Revelation, he has 10,000 of angels serving him. Jesus is the king of kings.

He knew that all things had been given into his hands. So what does he do? We verse 4, he rose from supper. He wraps, lays aside his garments, takes a towel, ties it around his waist, and then pours water into a basin and begins to wash his disciples' feet.

To understand what's going on, you don't need to know the details of, well, the roads in those days were covered with dust and excrement and all kinds of other things. You don't need to know that the job of the lowliest servant was to wash people's feet.

[ 7 : 54 ] Even here in the 21st century, Carlyway, we see the contrast, the king of all creation, stooping to the position of extraordinary humility.

What kind of king is Jesus? He's the king who came to be a servant, entitled, spoiled, arrogant, stuck up, superior, out of touch. Those things might be true of the kings and sars and emperors and princes and prime ministers and monarchs and envy are the government in history.

But none of those things are true of our Savior. Knowing that he is king of the universe doesn't prompt Jesus to get up on a throne, but to get down on his knees.

He has every right to rule, but instead he chooses to serve, in fact, he rules by serving. And as he washes his disciples' feet, we see the humble heart of our Savior beautifully displayed.

We see the character of God displayed. As the hymn puts it, this is our God, the servant king. In washing his disciples' feet, Jesus reveals the character of God, but he does more than that.

[ 9 : 07 ] He also shows not only his person, but his work, that he came to die. You see, the foot washing is also a prophetic action. It's a picture to help the disciples understand the events that are coming, the events that culminate in his crucifixion.

To understand what's going on here, I want you to think in terms of, think of it like an aircraft safety demonstration. Lots of you will have flown on planes. You probably know the Loganair safety demonstration off by heart.

In the event of emergency, please go to your nearest exit. Exits are located two at the front of the plane, one on either side, and two at the rear of the plane, one on either side. In the event of loss of cabin pressure, oxygen mask will drop from above your heads.

In the event of landing on water, please take your life jacket out and put it over your head. Wrap the ties around your waist and tie at a double knot at the side. I don't know if you've been on too many planes like me.

In each demonstration, a flight attendant is acting out what will happen in an emergency. In a similar way, Jesus, when he washes his disciples feet, he's acting out what is going to happen when he heads for the cross so that his disciples can understand what is happening in that event.

[ 10 : 26 ] This is seen most clearly when you look at the passage side by side with Philipians 2, which you read earlier, just put the table up on the screen. If you look at them side by side, you see the correspondence.

Jesus, though he was in the form of God, Paul writes, did not count the quality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself. Jesus, knowing he had come from God in John 13, rose from supper, laid aside his outer garments.

He takes the form of a servant and he serves. He washes his disciples feet. That washing is a picture of what Jesus is going to do in his death as we'll come to see.

Point by point, St. Clair Ferguson explains it. He says point by point, Jesus is acting out symbolically what Paul describes theologically, how he came from the highest glory of heaven into the depths of our human condition, how he took the form of a slave and accomplished our cleansing from sin by his death on the cross and then was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Jesus is the servant king and he came to serve by dying on a cross as he stripped down to the clothes of a servant, as he knelt down in the posture of a servant, as he did the menial task of the lowest servant.

[ 11 : 48 ] All of that pointed forward to the greater humbling to come when Jesus would be stripped and exposed naked on a cross for the world to see like a common slave and there he would die suffering as the suffering servant that we sang about in Isaiah 53.

Why does Jesus wash his disciples feet? First because it reveals his identity as the servant king and his work as the suffering servant. Second, it's a symbol.

First servant, second symbol. Jesus washes his disciples feet as a symbol of the washing that we all need. This flows directly from the previous point. Jesus is the servant king.

He serves by dying. But if you're new to the Christian faith, you might be wondering, well, how on earth does dying serve anyone? What does that achieve? Well, return to the passage with me and we'll see.

Let's read again from verse 5. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wash them with a towel, wipe them with a towel that was wrapped around him.

[ 13 : 00 ] And 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 afterwards you will understand.

Peter said, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me. If washing feet was all about Jesus showing his humility, then Jesus' response to Peter would seem petulant, would seem totally over the top.

He'd be like saying, look, I have to show how humble I am by washing your feet so you better let me or you can't be my friend. That's not what Jesus is saying.

It's not just about a demonstration of humility. It must be more than that. There is more going on. See, the language of having a share with me that Jesus says in verse 8, that's the language of inheritance.

If you know the parable of the prodigal son, he asks for his share now. Jesus is speaking about the glorious inheritance of the kingdom of God that awaits him and all his people.

[ 14 : 06 ] However, people don't just get to walk in. His disciples even don't just get to walk in. Everyone is shut on the outside. The only way in is to be washed by Jesus.

Jesus washes his disciples' feet because it's imperative, it's vital that they understand that they need to be washed if they want to be part of Jesus' family. You see, by nature we're all dirty.

Forget feet being covered by dust and excrement or anything else that's on the road. The Bible tells us that we have unclean hearts, hearts that are filthy with sin.

It's caked on there, it's muddied by all the wrong things we do, the way we break God's law, the way most of all we reject God as king. We choose to live our own way, not God's way.

That's the condition of every human heart. We can try to clean ourselves. We can try to do more good things than bad in hopes that it will clean us.

[ 15 : 05 ] But a stain is a stain. You can add frills to a garment, but if there's still a stain there, the garment's still there. I know lots of people like doing up vintage cars and tractors.

I wouldn't have a clue how to do that. But people get them polished and gleaming, don't they? Well, you can do up an old tractor. You can put on new hubcaps. You can paint them. You can put on new tires.

You can get nice, whatever shiny red paint that you want to on your Massey Ferguson, on new dials, new lights, etc. But if that engine is still rusted on the inside, it's still a broken tractor.

If you don't like tractors, well, then imagine instead your dog has died. Maybe that's a very sad thing to think about. But you could give that dog a wash.

You could give it a blow dry. You could comb it with so much grooming that it would win a dog award. But that wouldn't stop the dog being dead.

[ 16 : 02 ] You and I can give our lives a good lick of paint. We can wash and clean ourselves on the outside by living a good life as it were. However, none of that touches our hearts.

If our hearts are dirty, then we may as well be like a broken tractor or a dead dog. A dead dog with a makeover.

Sin makes us dirty. There's only one person who can make us clean, and that's Jesus. We have to be made clean by Jesus if we want to be part of his family.

How does Jesus make us clean? The answer is not by washing our feet. We see that in verse 9. Peter realizes that to be part of Jesus' family, he has to be washed.

He says in verse 9, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. That's Peter's normal reaction. He always kind of either kind of goes zero or 100 miles an hour.

[ 16 : 57 ] I wash my whole head, and Jesus says to him, the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean. Peter is so clean, he asks Jesus to wash his whole body.

He doesn't realize though that the foot washing is just a symbol. It's not the real deal. Rather, it points forward to the ultimate washing, where the real washing happens on the cross.

At the cross, Jesus serves us. How? Because at the cross, Jesus dies to wash away our sin. Not with water, but with his blood.

Later in his letter, 1 John, John will write that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. In the Old Testament, God gave Israel lots of sacrifices that they had to do that cleansed from sin.

But of course, it's impossible for just the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. We're told that in the Bible. Rather, all of those pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice.

[ 17 : 54 ] Jesus' death on the cross, where the real cleansing would happen. Jesus washes his disciples feet as a symbol that by his death, he will wash away sin, that only by his death can sin be washed away.

Jesus does it all. However, we need to let him wash us. The disciples needed to let him wash their feet. So let me ask you some hard questions.

Do you recognize that your heart is dirty with sin? Have you asked Jesus to wash you clean?

Do you trust that he can? The wonderful promise of the Gospel is that if we ask God to do that, he certainly will.

John puts it wonderfully in his letter. He says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[ 19 : 04 ] Washing is just a symbol. Jesus had to go to the cross because otherwise you and I couldn't be washed clean. Jesus chose to go to the cross so that you and I could be washed clean.

So Jesus washes his disciples feet first because he is a servant, second because washing is a symbol, and third now because it is the standard. Jesus washes his disciples feet to set a standard for how every disciple should live.

Read with me again from verse 12. 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 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.

[ 20 : 15 ] In washing his disciples feet, Jesus demonstrates that the heart of Christian discipleship is service. To be super clear, Jesus isn't talking about how we become a Christian but how we live as a Christian.

He isn't talking about how we get into the kingdom but how we live as people who are in the kingdom. We only get into the kingdom by being washed by Jesus.

We live in the kingdom by washing one another's feet. Of course Jesus isn't literally talking about washing each other's feet. It's the principle of serving one another.

If I try to apply that into every hour of each one of your lives, we would be here all day. Let me just paint in broad brush strokes for you to help us apply this, a portrait of a servant.

I want you to look at four parts of the body. Imagine we got this portrait of a servant. Four parts of the body I want to focus on. Look at the posture. A servant is on their knees.

[ 21 : 13 ] Servant discipleship begins with how we see ourselves. A servant is humble. We're not going to live as servants if our hearts are proud, if we think we're greater than other people.

If we think that other people owe us anything. In the passage we read earlier, Paul says that the Philippians do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Count everyone else as more significant. That's pretty counter-cultural. Everyone else, that kind of humility comes not from comparing ourselves to others.

If you do that you're either going to become proud or insecure. Rather, C.S. Lewis says humility isn't thinking less of yourself. It's thinking about yourself less.

True humility doesn't come from measuring ourselves against other people, but kneeling down alongside Jesus Christ. Second, look at the eyes.

[ 22 : 13 ] So first look at the posture. Second look at the eyes. A servant sees the world differently. We live in an individualistic age. You and I have hearts that are naturally self-centered.

And as a result, it's like we're wearing a pair of glasses naturally that looks at everything and says, what can I gain, what do I need, what do I want? In the passage we read earlier, Paul says to the Philippians, let each of you look not only to his own interests, but to the interests of others.

As disciples, we need to take off the glass of self and put on the glasses of service. To look at every person, every situation, every conversation and not say, what can I gain, but what can I give?

Now let me tell you, you're going to have to keep putting those glasses on. They easily fall off in the morning when you wake up before you start stressing and demanding.

You have to put on those glasses. Say, not what can I gain, but what can I give? When you come home from work and you're feeling tired and hungry and maybe a bit fed up, you are going to have to consciously put on those glasses of service, not of self.

[ 23 : 27 ] When your family members come back home and they're a bit tired and grumpy, you're going to have to consciously put on those glasses of service and not self. Look to their needs before your own.

Not what can I gain, but what can I give? We've looked at the posture, we've looked at the eyes, third look at the lips, a servant blesses with their speech. One of the most important ways in which we can serve people is how we talk to each other is what we do with our words.

You see, our words have the potential to build up or to tear down. That's because we were made in the image of a speaking God and his words are powerful.

He created all things with the breath of his mouth. He upholds all things with his words. He gives life with his words. We were made in the image of a speaking God, words of power, but a servant uses that power not for themselves, but for others.

We've seen that again and again in Jesus' life, how he uses his words to give life, how he uses his words to serve. Perhaps we see that most of all in these chapters, chapters 13 to 17, where in these last 24 hours before Jesus' life, what does he do?

[ 24 : 43 ] He doesn't say to his disciples, look, look, I need you to like, you need to help me a second, I need you to come for me. No, he uses his words to comfort them. He uses his words to pray for them, to teach for them.

In every conversation, Jesus is looking to see how he can serve. A servant uses their words to love people like Jesus. So we've looked at the posture, we've looked at the eyes, we've looked at the lips.

Fourth look at the arms. A servant is intentional, a servant is reaching out. It's one thing to respond to need that appears immediately in front of us, it's another to go looking for need, to intentionally search for need.

As a society, we don't tend to ask for help. We're taught that we should just tough it out. That's not what Jesus' kingdom looks like though.

Some of us need to get better at asking for help. All of us need to get better at looking for how we can help. Looking for how we can reach out and serve others.

[ 25 : 51 ] Whether that's looking for people standing on their own after church, whether that's crossing their room and encouraging with them, whether that's going to someone's house and looking for how we can serve them, what needs to be said, what needs to be done, whether that's picking up the phone, whether that's sending a text, whether that's often asking intentional questions to find out how someone's really doing.

So you can get down to the gravel of how we can really serve them. A servant is kneeling in humility.

They're looking to give and not to gain. They're speaking to bless. They're reaching out to serve. That's the portrait of a servant.

It's up for each one of us then to ask how, what's that going to look like? What's it going to look like for us? What's it going to look like for our face to be in that picture in each aspect of our lives?

And servanthood is the call for every disciple, but it's worth pointing out that Jesus especially calls those who are leaders to follow in this path of serving.

[ 27 : 00 ] In Mark 10, Jesus says to his disciples, he called them to him and said, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles, lord it over them, and they're great ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you.

But whoever would be great must be your servant. Whoever would be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Leaders aren't exempt from being servants. They're meant to be model servants. Leadership isn't about dominance.

It's about humble service. So especially those of you who are elders and deacons, think about that for how you lead in the church.

Those of you who have any position of authority at work, think about that. It's about service, not dominance. Those of you who have families, many of us will be in positions of leadership in families and how we care for our families.

[ 28 : 06 ] It's not about dominance, it's about service. We're called to be servants. We're called to look like that portrait of a servant. But if you're anything like me, day by day you wince because our lives don't look like that.

The good news is that that portrait is first and foremost a portrait of our Savior. The one who's gone before us, our servant king, the one who got down not just on his knees to wash his disciples feet, but the one who descended to death, even death on a cross to wash our sins, wash us clean from sin.

He is the perfect likeness of a servant. And you know what? Well we may not look like that servant in the portrait now. Jesus is changing us. If we're trusting in him, he is transforming us to be more and more in the image of his son.

God is transforming us to look more and more like his servant king. The servant king who was washed as clean. The servant king who is shaping us our lives to be like him.

The servant who gives us strength, king who gives us strength to serve one another. Oh that we may decrease and that he may increase. To him be the glory forever.

[ 29 : 19 ] Amen.