

June 30, 2019

John 13:1-17

"A Servant Church"

Today we're going to talk about the picture of a servant. Jesus knew that what we think a servant is and what he wants us to understand about servanthood are two different things. So here in John 13, Jesus paints a vivid picture of what a servant is.

As we move into John 13, we're going to enter one of the most glorious sections of the Bible. It begins in the Upper Room, where Jesus gathers with his disciples on the night before his death. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Lord's Supper is the focus in the Upper Room. John doesn't focus on the Lord's Supper. His focus is on what Jesus says. Remember, this is the night before the last day of Jesus' earthly life. It's really important for John to accurately record these final hours. The exciting part of John 13-17 is we get to hear what everybody is talking about. We get to hear everything that's going on. We are invited in to these significant moments. We get to hear what is said and what happens.

These are powerful chapters with powerful truths. I recently read where someone speculates that John 10:10 reads like an outline of the book of John. If you remember, here's John 10:10:

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

What two things are most evident in that passage? Right...to have life and to have it abundantly. Eternal life and abundant life. Flowing out of 10:10, here's how John divides up. Chapters 1-12 describe how to have eternal life. We see it in Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well and in his conversation with Nicodemus and then when he raises Lazarus from the dead and says *I am the resurrection and the life*. As we've seen, for the Christian, eternal life begins the moment you hear Jesus calling you by name, and you know that he died on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. That's eternal life. That's where John takes us up through chapter 12. And then the rest of John, from chapters 13-17, outlines how we can have abundant life.

Based on the Biblical understanding of eternal life I just shared, most of you here this morning have eternal life in Jesus Christ {*Amen?*} You are a

believer already in Jesus Christ. So let me ask you...and I want you to think honestly and deeply about your answer:

Do you ever struggle with having abundant life, even though you already have eternal life in Jesus Christ?

Here's what John wants us to know. No one is perfect. No one has perfect faith. So even though you know you are saved in Jesus Christ, there are times when you need to go back to the Upper Room and hear again from Jesus about how you can enjoy abundant living.

Here's the first thing Jesus shows us. Jesus says *serve one another*. If you want to have abundant life, learn how to love people...learn how to share the abundant life...learn how to share joy.

Remember, this teaching takes place the night before Jesus dies. Jesus knows he's going to die. So it's a crucial teaching. And here's the key thing to remember. **Jesus starts this teaching not by what he says but by what he does.** Jesus gives them an example of service.

It is a counter-intuitive example. In other words, if I wanted to give an

example of how to live abundantly, I'd compile a list of things I get from culture and common sense. Abundant life would include education, a nice place to live, good food, comfortable wages, vacation opportunities, good health, engaging entertainment options, access to technology, a way to escape cold Michigan winters or hot Michigan summers or both, a reliable car, and a padded retirement account. You get the pattern. When thinking about abundance, most of us start with selfishness. We start with what we want. Jesus says, turn it upside down. Take that pyramid of perceived needs and stand it on its point. **Start with serving others and loving others, and you will find God-given abundance.**

Here's what Jesus says a servant looks like.

First, a servant loves. As Jesus says in 13:1, **"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."** Jesus is going to show them what love is. He serves them. And how does he serve them? By washing their feet. This act of servanthood is a prelude to what happens the next day. When Jesus goes to the cross, he loves us as deeply as he

can love us. I hope that makes sense to you.

Another truth-telling time. When I say servant, what picture pops into your mind? {Show pictures} See, when we think of servants, we usually think of someone who's doing a job. We don't first think of someone who loves. When we think of servant, we think of someone who does something because they have to. Or because it's their duty. Or their job. And that's exactly what service without love is. A job I have to do. How many of you remember when you were a kid and there was a chore you had to do and you did it grudgingly? {By the way, *grudgingly* and *begrudgingly* mean the same thing, in the same way *flammable* and *inflammable* have the same meaning. Weird.} So, what I just did there wasn't a chore. I didn't have to do it. I did it because I love you and I love bringing little bits of knowledge to your ears, even if it is totally unnecessary or unimportant. I do it because I love. Jesus is showing us a new kind of servant-mentality. We serve because we love.

Without love, what happens to service? It sours. How many of you like *Sour Patch Kids*? Any kind of sour candy? Sour foods? Definitely not sour

milk. The fun thing about most sour candy is you get to the sweet center.

Some people think that way about service. It sours on them. Christian service should never make you sour. There should be joy in it. So if service is making you sour...whether it's raising your kids, or your job, or your work for God in some volunteer way...if you are growing sour in serving, then chapter 13 is for you. If you need to be encouraged in any way in servanthood, then chapter 13 is for you. If you're feeling you're not getting your due recognition...or you're not getting honored...or you're feeling underappreciated...if somehow, someway serving God is making you sour, then you know something is wrong. There's nothing sour about serving. Servanthood is sweet, start to finish. There is joy in service. That's what Jesus is modeling. Servants are people who love.

Here's a question you might want to write down:

Who is it in my life that I need to begin to serve again?

Don't look at it as a duty. I need to trade duty for service. I need to choose to love.

So here's the example Jesus gives us:

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.

That is the picture of a servant.

Second, servants are strong.

If it's in your heart to serve others, can you be taken advantage of?

Absolutely not. What's one of the most common reasons we let people take advantage of us? Guilt. We don't want to appear selfish. We feel guilty if it doesn't look like we're helping enough. But if you have a servant's heart, you're finding ways to serve, and so you've created space in which you can sometimes say "no."

Servants are strong.

Here's where we see strength in Jesus:

- **He has strong direction.** Jesus know he is heading to the cross. So it's crucial for him to show his disciples how to serve. You need a strong internal spiritual compass to know where you're going, by God's grace. You are in charge of your life because you know where you are going.
- **There's strong authority.** In other words, Jesus knows who is in charge. He knows where God is leading him. He knows that God is in control, and all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose. When you are serving according to God's purpose, you have all the authority you need.
- **Finally, there's the strength of identity.** Jesus knows who he is and whose he is. More than anything else, God wants you to be confident in who you are. When you are serving God, there's nothing in all creation that can separate you from His grace and mercy. In Christ, all will always be well with your soul. How's that for strength of identity?

Here's what I've learned in my life. People who are in an identity crisis

aren't very good servants. They're so busy trying to find out who they are, they don't have much else left to give to other people. That's why Jesus came into this world...to show us who we are...to give us his direction...and to show us he's got things under his control. The greatest servants are strong, secure people.

We'll end there, before picking up next time with something very evident and obvious in our lives:

Servant are imperfect people.

If you are a perfect person, then you don't need to come back for that.