

July 21, 2019

John 13:1-17

## "An Imperfect Servant Church"

We've been talking about how we serve. Here are the first two principles for Biblical servanthood:

First, a servant loves.

Second, servants are strong.

The third piece is **servants serve imperfect people.** Or, to put it more precisely, servants are imperfect people serving other imperfect people.

You know what would make servanthood easier? If people were perfect. If people were always likeable. If people were never jerks. I tell you what, that would make my job a lot easier. If I didn't have to deal with imperfect people. And it would certainly make me a better pastor; if I weren't an imperfect person. It would be better for you if you had a perfect pastor. But no such things exist. Servants are imperfect people serving other imperfect people.

Think about it. When he washed their feet, Jesus knew who he was. He knew what he was about to do...die on the cross for them, because of their sin. Jesus was perfect. They were not. Jesus knew who he was and he knew who they were. Think about it. Knowing these things, Jesus washed their feet. Imperfect feet. Loud mouths. Braggarts. Betrayers. Doubters. Cowards. All of them. Jesus washed their feet.

Chuck Swindoll, a great Bible teacher, calls it *a room of proud hearts and dirty feet.*

When I think about this moment, in the back of my mind I wonder what it would have been like to be there. Knowing what we know about Jesus...the disciples were slowly understanding but not there yet...knowing what we know, what would it have felt like to have Jesus wash your feet? We know Jesus was going to the cross the next day. We know Judas was going to betray him. We know Peter was going to deny knowing him. We know Thomas was going to doubt him. What would that be like? Throw us, with all our sins, faults, and foibles in there, and it becomes an incredible display of servanthood.

Think about when Jesus washes Judas' feet. Jesus never gives up on him. How easily do you give up on people? Jesus knows what's in Judas' heart. He knows Satan is working through Judas. And still Jesus washes his feet. Jesus never gives up on Judas. Jesus holds his hand out toward Judas until the end. I love how much our Savior loves us. Where would we be if Jesus ever gave up on us? That's the kind of servanthood he shows us.

One last moment that illustrates Jesus' perseverance in serving imperfect people. Listen to the exchange between Peter and Jesus:

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize 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 with me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 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."*

- John 13:6-10

I love the literal translation of verse 6: "Lord you of me do wash the feet."  
There's just something sublimely pleasing about that.

Can you hear how messed up Peter's thinking is? His first reaction is understandable and defensible. He tries to stop Jesus. Jesus then explains how this lesson in servanthood will make sense when they all see the bigger picture. Peter should have left it at that. Maybe a normal retort would be to say something like, "No, no, no, I should be washing your feet." But remember, we're talking about imperfect people, just like us. So, leaping without looking, Peter says *wash my hands and my head as well*. He is so ham-handed.

Guess who else is ham-handed? Guess who else can be oaf-like at times? Me. And yet Jesus never gives up on me. That's one of the best lessons from this moment in the Upper Room. And so we should never give up on those whom God has called us to serve. As long as it's not illegal, immoral, unbiblical or toxic to your own well-being, serve people even when they're difficult. After all, we're all imperfect.

So far, we've seen how:

1. A servant loves.

2. Servants are strong.

3. Servants serve imperfect people.

Finally, servants aren't showy.

Servants don't try to impress people. They're not about grasping for attention or gaining recognition. There's no such thing as a spotlight servant. When Jesus shows us how to serve, he does it quietly and privately. He doesn't make a big deal out of it.

Here's an important side note. Have you ever been to one of those services where people recreate the Upper Room foot washing? Some people think verses 14-17 are to be followed literally:

*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.*

Feet are gross and disgusting. But if this were commanded, then I would have to suck-it-up and wash some feet. But you see, this example of foot washing is a representation of bigger concept. Servanthood. Humility. Sacrifice. Loving kindness. Whenever people have a foot washing ceremony for lots of people to see, it kind of defeats the whole purpose, right? "Look at how humbly I am serving." Yikes.

Foot washing is the placeholder for the bigger, bolder concept. It's not like foot washing is the only kind of service authorized by Jesus. "Nope, I can't hold the bucket for you while you throw up and then wipe your chin because Jesus didn't command me to do that." Foot washing is the example of the concept. Servanthood is the point. And not servanthood for a show. Not to impress a crowd. But simply meeting someone's need. The disciples' feet were dirty. Jesus washed them. Not in a showy way. But in a way that is normally done.

How can you serve others? How are you serving others?

Whatever you do, do it with a servant's heart. Don't be showy. Don't

expect recognition or something in return. Simply do it because you love Jesus and you love the people Jesus loves. We're all imperfect. None of us deserve to be loved or to be shown love. And yet we are and we do. We meet the needs of others. What an honor and a privilege that is. And here's what I want you to remember, most of all. The wonder and the beauty of servanthood is we do it because Jesus did it for us on the cross. That's why, with a servant's heart, you are quietly and lovingly washing feet.