

Born to Serve

11/16/25

A couple came to a theater one time to hear a famous orchestra play Beethoven Symphony #9. They came early because they wanted to beat the crowd. When they got the tickets, only back seats were available. As they were seating in the back of the theater, they noticed that there were two seats at the front that were vacant. About five minutes before the concert started, those front two seats were still vacant. The couple decided to move to those front two seats because they wanted a better view even though the front seats were twice as expensive. As soon as they sat down, an usher came with two people walking behind them. The usher asked for their tickets and after looking at them, told them that they had to move to the back seats because the two front seats was reserved for two important people. The couple behind the usher had given over 1 million dollars to the theater and they were given those two front rows seat ever time they came to see a concert. The other couple left the theater because they felt too ashamed to go back to the back seats again. This year I had to help with parking at a York County event where past government officials were coming to speak. I was in charge of the VIP parking. The past PA Governors and a few Senators were allowed in this special lot. I was given a list of names and I was told that no one else could enter. I had two separate vehicles that came and I was told by the drivers they had the right to park in VIP parking lot. Their names were not on the list, I made them leave, and they left VERY angry. They had to park in the common person parking lot. Most events you go to, important people usually get the better seating and better of everything else. It is what it is. It's the common Joe who has to get the leftovers. When Jesus came, He changed that type of thinking. Maybe I should say that Jesus changed that type of thinking for His followers. Rest of the world still looks down on certain people. We put everybody in some type of group. I'm the senior Ranger at the park and I should get special privileges – so I think. Even when we do serve other people, our motives are usually distorted. Jesus would show His disciples that even though He was the Son of God, He came to serve. If He came to serve, then His disciples must follow in His footsteps as well. So, what does it mean to serve as a true follower of Jesus? Let's read some Scripture first.

Let's turn to John 13: 1-5 where we read this, "It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (NIV – www.biblegateway.com)"

For the past several weeks, John has shown us through his Gospel that Jesus was and is the Son of God. We've looked at Scripture where Jesus healed the blind and the lame. Not only that, but last week Jesus raised a good friend of His to life after he had died. Plus, Jesus was a Rabbi, so Jesus had a human title that was looked up to. Jesus was becoming a well-known person as His fame was spreading across the Middle East area. We now come to the Scripture we just read. Jesus now has gone back to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover celebration. Jesus knew His time had come to go to the cross. His time with His disciples was drawing to a close. Jesus wanted to celebrate one last meal as their Rabbi. John tells us in verse 1 that Jesus now showed the disciples the full extent of His love or the NIV translation – He loved them to the end. In other words, what Jesus was about to do was His last act of love to His disciples as their Rabbi. The cross would be an act of love for all people. This was a special time for Jesus with His disciples. To show His full extent of His love for them, Jesus got up from the meal they were sharing together, took off his outer clothing, wrapped a towel around His waist, poured water into a bowl, and started to wash His disciple's feet and drying them with the towel that He had wrapped around Himself. Feet washing was as common then as hand washing is in our time. People wore open sandals and dust from the Middle East terrain would be baked on people's feet. So, foot washing was common practice when entering someone's house. However, there is a problem.

Let's read more in John 13: 6-11, "6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷ Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

⁸ “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹ “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. (NIV – www.biblegateway.com)

Peter and the disciples must have been surprised to see their Rabbi get down into the slave level. Jesus was doing something that a trained slave would have done during this time period. Dr. Joseph Dongell, who is a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary states, “By each of these deliberate actions, Jesus adopted the look and role of a slave”. Peter is the brave one who speaks out against Jesus getting down to this level to wash the feet of the disciples. Jesus tells the disciples that they won’t realize what He is doing till later. I believe Jesus is talking about the great movement of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when He (the Spirit) gives the disciples wisdom to understand Jesus’ past teachings. The disciples were having a hard time understanding this because they were used to being served, not serving others. Think about it. Look at us as Americans. We want to be served. We may spend a day at a soup kitchen handing out food to the poor for one day a year, then we want to be served for the rest of the year. The human nature does not like serving, it likes to be served. It’s only when we allow the Holy Spirit full control of our human nature that we start to see the real meaning of serving others. Then, Jesus makes this statement in verse 8 that unless He does this washing of feet, they can have no part with Him. Serving was part of Jesus’ DNA. Jesus told His disciples this before they came into Jerusalem in Matthew 20: 28, “For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many” (NLT). So, Jesus had already told the

disciples about His mission before the foot washing event and they still didn't get it like Christians today don't get it. Now, this foot washing can represent what the cross would do for us. The rejection of this foot washing can represent the rejection of the cross and when you reject the cross, you can't be part of Jesus. There has to be a washing of the heart and mind through Jesus. I also believe Jesus is telling us here that for us to be part of Him, we must have the same DNA for serving those around us. If we don't want to serve Jesus or others, then how can we say we are true followers of Jesus? Jesus took this serving thing all the way to the cross. Why is it so hard for us to serve the Lord and the people around us? What motivated Jesus to wash the feet of the disciples and then go to the cross?

Let's continue with John and let's go to John 13: 12-17 to finish this story, "12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (NIV – www.biblegateway.com)

Jesus now tells His disciples that He has set the example for them which also means this story is an example for us. We are to serve in the same way Jesus served even if this means we have to lay down our life. Why did Jesus allow Himself to become a servant? Was it because He had to? Was He forced to serve? I had a pastor tell me one time how it got to the point where they felt like they had to force people in their church to serve. What motivated Jesus serve like this? John, who was a true witness to Jesus washing feet states this in 1 John 3: 14 – 24, "14 If we love our brothers and sisters who are believers,^[a] it proves that we have passed from death to life. But a person who has no love is still dead. 15 Anyone who hates another brother or sister^[b] is really a murderer at heart. And you know that murderers don't have eternal life within them.

¹⁶ We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister^[c] in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. ¹⁹ Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. ²⁰ Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. ²¹ Dear friends, if we don’t feel guilty, we can come to God with bold confidence. ²² And we will receive from him whatever we ask because we obey him and do the things that please him. ²³ And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us. ²⁴ Those who obey God’s commandments remain in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Spirit he gave us lives in us. (NLT – www.biblegateway.com)

John finally understood the foot washing that Jesus gave and he may have had that on his mind when he wrote this part of the letter. The motivation for Jesus to do the feet washing and going to the cross afterwards was love or real love as John calls it. The Church in America has gone away from this real love. We do our empty good deeds to satisfy our own pride and longings or we do them just to say we did them because we think we have to serve others. We have a major real love issue in the Church today and it’s affecting everything we’re doing. It’s almost like we are now like the disciples before Pentecost. Jesus is our example. Jesus states this in Matthew 22: 37 – 40, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (NLT). Jesus demonstrated this Scripture at the cross. He did the Will of His Father out of love and He allowed Himself to be killed out of love for us. Jesus washed His disciple’s feet out of love for His Father and He did it out of love for His disciples. Jesus tells us that all other commands and demands that Scripture has for us comes from the one Great Commandment and that includes serving. We serve out of love for our Lord, the Trinity, and then we can love the people around us in the proper way including our enemies. Jesus died for His enemies as well on the cross. We have to make serving a love issue because

both serving and real love go together. If God's love is not involved, then we're not serving in the right manner. Plus, when we have this real love mixed in, we also serve righteously. In other words, we won't do anything or support anything while serving that will cheapen that real Godly love because it is righteous love. I hope that makes sense. Real serving has to be done through the love of God. So, we must pray for that. We must ask our Lord Jesus to help us through the Holy Spirit to serve through His love. We need help in this because if we serve on our own, we will distort the real way we are to serve for Jesus. Lord, help us to serve out of love for you and allow your love to help us to serve the people around us. Amen

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc: Wheaton, 1996