

Improving Your Serve

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 February 2025

Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[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 them, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now.

But afterward, you will understand. Peter said to him, you should never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

[1 : 1 1] Simon Peter said to him, Lord, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus said to him, calm down, Peter. The one who has 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 was why he said, not all of you are clean. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed this 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 teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you should, that also you 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.

So, if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

[2 : 3 3] Thank you. Thank you, praise team again. You know, to be called a servant doesn't seem like something anyone would aspire to.

We tell our children, we are raising you to be leaders. I remember a mother and father were in my office one day, and they were telling me that because they were homeschooling their children, they were raising up the leaders for the next generation.

How many parents tell their children, we are raising up you to be servants? Some will talk about servant leaders. And that's what husbands are to be in the home.

Servant, self-sacrificial leaders. That's what elders and deacons are to be in the church. I think that is what politicians were originally supposed to be in our country.

Some police departments, beginning with L.A., I think back in the 60s, still have the words on their patrol cars as a motto. What is the motto?

- [3 : 46] To protect and serve. Yes. But before them all, we have Jesus. The greatest servant who more than anyone exemplified that motto to protect and serve.
- He actually protected by serving. Because in serving, he saved. He achieved the greatest good in glorifying his father and saving his people by the cross.
- What service? But do his people look like him? Are Christians known as servants? Or are we seen as though proudly grasping for power?
- Demanding our seat at the table like everyone else? I think most of us will probably admit we need to improve our serve.
- As I said, we're in a new section, a very important section. This is the Lord's private time with his disciples before his death.
- [4 : 53] It's coming soon. This is the night of the Lord's Supper. He's soon to give himself for us. This is called the farewell discourse.
- Verses, chapters 13 through 17. One section where Jesus is in the upper room teaching. What is he doing before the cross? Teaching.
- Giving the gospel. Making sure his disciples get it as much as they can. John doesn't include the institution of the Lord's Supper as the other gospels do.
- But instead, we have this scene, which none of them have. The scene of the washing of feet. This scene comes at the beginning of the Lord's Supper.
- It is in God's providence that we come to this section as we are about to enter the Lenten season. That season to prepare us for Good Friday, which is the death of Jesus on the cross.
- [5 : 50] It is at this moment, right here, that Jesus shows us how to improve our serve. First of all, improving your serve takes tenacious love.
- Notice in verse 1, Jesus loves his disciples. I mean, this is John's commentary, by the way. It's inspired. It's the Spirit of God. But notice what he says.
- Now before the feast of the Passover, 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.
- Here we see a very clear statement of the Lord's priority, the priority of his heart. He knew this was his time.
- He knew this was his final Passover before the cross. Now he will be the Paschal Lamb. He will fulfill what his cousin, John the Baptist, said in John chapter 1, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
- [6 : 59] Here it comes. But at the heart of the Son of God's work, at the heart of it, is love. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son in chapter 3.
- And here it is. Jesus gathered his first disciples and cared for them, taught them, protected them, all in love for them. But in love for us.
- He loved his disciple who were in the world. That is in this material world of creation. This is meant to highlight the fact that he's departing out of the world. To return to the glory of his father.
- He will no longer be with his disciples in the way he was with them in our text. Physically, bodily. And he didn't stop loving them. All the way to the cross.
- He loved them to the end. This ragtag group of men who were arguing about who is the greatest in the kingdom. This ragtag group of men who, when his feet were washed by Mary, grumbled and complained that instead of pouring out that expensive ointment on Jesus, it could have been sold and given to the poor.

[8 : 23] These men who never seemed to get what Jesus is doing, whose faith was very weak. He loved them to the end. Can you relate to them at all?

When he gasped his last breath on the cross, he did it in love for his people. And he hasn't stopped loving his disciples to this day.

Our hearts, our names were written on his heart as he went to the cross. When you take your last breath on this side of glory, you will be so wrapped in the arms of his love.

The Apostle Paul really got this. Oh, he really got this. When he asked and answered a very important question in Romans chapter 8, he asked this question. Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ?

What a question. How does he answer it? Shall tribulation, that's hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Shall they do it?

[9 : 25] As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. But no. Big no.

In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor death, nor...

Here's a big one. Nor anything else in all creation. Fill in the blank. Will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He loved us to the end. And he won't stop loving us now. Look at that list I just read. It includes all kinds of calamity, even spiritual beings, good angels, and bad powers.

These are all things that can make us feel abandoned by God when we experience them. We can add sickness and disease to this list. We may think to ourselves, or some might even say to us, if God really loved you, he wouldn't let you suffer so.

[10 : 42] If you ever heard that in your mind, well, God forbid it's ever been said to you, as a friend of mine would say, that smells like sulfur.

It's from the pit. Understand that suffering in this fallen world that is at war with God is the norm for those who follow the Lamb.

So in this passage, he's putting some steel in our spines and hope in our hearts. Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of the one who loved us to the end.

He is praying. In Ephesians chapter 3, he will pray for us that the Spirit of God would so work in our hearts that we would know the great deep, wide, and high love of Christ more intimately, filling us with God's fullness.

He wants us to know the love. And to improve our serve, we must continually be filled with the knowledge of Christ's love for us.

[11 : 52] 10 Corinthians chapter 5 is very powerful. Verses 14 and 15. He says, Wow. The love of Christ exerts a controlling influence in your life, in your heart.

Because we have concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died to our old lives. He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Paul gets to the heart of our sinful condition. We live for ourselves. That's the heart of it. Self-centeredness, selfishness.

We live for ourselves, but Jesus died in love for you so that you will no longer live for you. But you will live for him who for your sake loved you to the end and died for your sins.

Hallelujah. Do you know that Jesus died for your sins? That is the first question, isn't it? If so, then let his love wash over you again and again so that it begins to control you.

[13 : 09] It begins to control how you interact with other people. But that's what love is about. Love is communal. It's not theoretical. It's communal.

Love is action. If the love of Christ is upon us, that love will affect how we behave toward other people, especially those of the household of faith.

I'm afraid our love is cold. A friend of mine just recently was trolled on the internet. He's a godly man.

A man who's been used greatly in our denomination. Yet some dear sister in Christ decided that she would attack him on the internet because she didn't like something he was doing.

how the love of the saints looks nothing like the love of Christ. When we are filled with his love, we treat each other better, differently.

[14 : 16] When you are full of his love for you, that love will bubble up in you. It can't help it. When you are saturated with the love of Jesus, when you recognize that you are that sinner, you are that one who deserved hell, that you are that...

I said it. I said hell. Yes, I did. But you deserve eternal punishment. You are that one. And you recognize that out of nowhere, he shows his love for you.

And you did nothing to deserve or earn it. Let that love wash over you every single morning. Wake up to love. Walk in love.

Go to sleep in love. In the love of Jesus. It will transform you. You will no longer live for yourself, but for him. And in doing so, you will be able to love your brothers and sisters self-sacrificially like him to the end.

And that love will also spill over to your neighbors, to those who don't know Jesus. It can't help it. You will love people around you. You will learn to love your neighbor. Husbands, you will love your wives as Christ loved the church.

[15 : 28] And wives, you will submit to your husbands as to the Lord. And children will obey their parents and the Lord in love because this is right. Where is our love?

We won't be talking about racial reconciliation anymore. We won't be talking about it. When the love really flows, when the love of Christ really saturates us, we don't have to talk about it.

We'll be demonstrating it. Amen. Amen. The problem is we have to talk about it because we got problems. But one day we won't.

One day. So until that time, yes, we do talk about it. But we talk about it because it's about love. That's the secret, saints. That is the secret sauce.

It's love. I don't care. You can have all the meetings you want to talk about all the problems we have racially and ethnic and social. You can do all of that. Amen to that. But at the end of the day, if you don't have love for each other, it's a waste of your time.

[16 : 35] If you're not willing to allow yourself to love your brothers and sisters who look nothing like you, it's a waste of time. Amen. So first of all, to improve our serve takes tenacious love.

Love to the end. The second thing, improving your serve takes awe of the great servant. I think that's what's happening here in verses 2 through 7. The devil had already primed Judas to betray our Lord.

We'll look at that in more detail in coming messages. But John says our Lord knew three things, three things concerning the Father that Jesus knew. One, the Father had given all things into his hands.

He had come from the Father and he was returning to the Father. What does that mean? Jesus knew who he was. That's what it boils down to.

Jesus knew who he was. All things in his hands could refer to his authority over all creation. But I think especially speaks of his control over these next events surrounding his betrayal, his arrest, his flogging, his crucifixion, his resurrection, and his ascension.

[17 : 54] All of that was in his hands. He was not a victim. He was a victor. He was reigning, showing his power.

All of those events were right here in his holy hands. The powers of darkness are about to flex their muscles, but the real power is with Jesus.

And this self-awareness is what sets the stage for what he's about to do. Listen, saints, think about it. When you know who you are, you can serve because you know you are not diminished by serving or being low or being last.

Jesus was not diminished by serving. He knew who he was. If you are a Christian, you are a son and a daughter of the living God. You are a little brother, a little sister to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You have the Holy Spirit within you. You are holy ground because the Spirit of Christ lives in you. Don't you get it? You've been redeemed. That is, bought out of the slave market of sin and set free in Christ.

[19 : 04] Do you get it? Do you know who you are? When you know who you are, you can serve. We refuse to serve because we're insecure about who we are.

We have to fight to be first. We have to fight for identity. We have to remake our identity. But God tells you, child of God, who you are. Nothing to fight for.

He's given it to you. And it cannot be taken away from you. You lose nothing by apologizing. You lose nothing by serving someone who you may think is less than you.

I hope you don't, but you know. So Jesus picks up a very long towel must have been very big because he wraps it around his waist and still has enough left.

So that's beach towel. We would call it a beach towel. And John, but I think John's in awe. That's what I'm saying. It takes awe of the great servant. John's in awe of the fact that Jesus would do what he did.

[20 : 10] He's blown away. Let me, let me remind you what he says here. Listen to John's language. Let's start in verse 3. Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things to his hands, he had come from God, was going back to God, rose from supper.

Now John is painstakingly describing the scene. Why? He's amazed. He laid us out his outer garments, taking a towel, tied it around his waist.

Then he poured water into a basin. He began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Peter who said, Lord, do you wash my feet?

What I am doing, you do not understand now, but afterward, you will understand. Painstaking details because he can't believe it.

He's blown away by it. He had to describe it to us. He could have just said, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. That would have been fine. That was enough. No, no. He's got to tell us the details because he's like, when Jesus rose from the dead, it became all clear who Jesus was.

[21 : 22] But even now, he's the rabbi. He's their leader. He's their teacher, their master, their lord, he says. And for him to do this, it goes against social custom. In that culture, that was usually done by a slave.

At the very least, one of the disciples should have been willing to do it because when they came into the room, likely there was a basin of water and a towel by the door. They wore sandals, remember, and the roads were dirt, so dirty feet were coming.

And since they ate by reclining at the table, remember, they were reclining on the floor and they tend to live on their left arm. That means feet are in people's face.

So it was important to wash the feet. It was etiquette and kindness to make sure your guests' feet were washed. One source said this, indeed, the task of washing feet was so menial that it was placed among, that it's placed among work Jewish male slaves should not be required to do.

Such work is to be served for Gentile slaves, forgive me ladies, for wives and for their children. That was that culture. We don't believe that, but that was that culture.

[22 : 40] So it was too menial beneath them, too low for any of his disciples to do this service, but not too menial for Jesus, the Lord of glory.

Not too menial for him. Wow! Are you kidding me? And Peter got it. Peter got at least that part. Lord, do you wash my feet?

I think he said it quietly. Maybe he even pulled his feet away from Jesus. Now, to Peter's credit, he understood the greatness of his teacher, like I said, but he did not understand his teacher's heart.

The great did not even think of doing such things. I wonder if today, though, we would have said, as Jesus washed the feet, we would have said something like this, so glad somebody doing it, because these feet stank.

I can't eat with somebody's smelly feet in front of my face. Jesus, that is so humble of you. I think that's us today. Forgive me, I'm a little cynical.

[23 : 48] Peter, though, is so in awe that he scandalized that Jesus would do this. So I ask you a question. Are you in awe?

Are you looking at this scene, and are you shaking your head internally? Are you going, what a Savior? Have you come to the place where you just say, oh, that's just Jesus.

That's just Jesus. That's how he do. You're missing it. He should not be there. doing that. Do you understand?

He should not be doing this. They all should have been taking turns, washing his feet. Nay, Herod, Pilate, the Roman governor, all of the Jewish leaders, and Caesar himself should have been racing each other to wash the feet of Jesus.

That is what should have happened. And here we have the Son of God behaving like a Gentile slave, washing the disciples' feet.

[24 : 55] I'm sure the angels in heaven were tripping. They were like, wow! I can see Michael and Gabriel going, oh, no, we, no, he didn't. I'm serious.

I mean, they didn't know that was going to happen. Jesus just says to Peter, what I'm doing, you don't understand now because he didn't.

But afterward, later, after the resurrection, it's all going to become clear. You see, to improve your serve, you once again need to live in awe, in amazement, in holy fear fear of the Son of God who came not to be served but to serve that he might save.

He was made, he has made you a son and a daughter and nothing can change that. You are destined for the glory, so serve. Even if it's beneath you, be in awe, watch your Savior, catch, let it, let your breath catch.

It'll be, this, I guess the only thing, I could liken this to would be Jesus washing your toilets. Showing up at your house and saying, I got this.

[26 : 14] And going into your bathrooms and washing your toilets and your tub and your sink. But that's Jesus.

The Son of God serves and he loses nothing and you lose nothing when you serve. Do you know who you are?

Thirdly, improving your serve comes from the cleansing of Christ. Verses 8 through 11. Peter isn't done with his church protest.

He loses his mind once again and becomes obstinate with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, you shall never wash my feet. Now listen, the original language is even stronger than that.

One thing is he kept saying it. You will never wash. No, you will never wash my feet. He kept saying it. And his words are a strong denial. It's the same phrase that our Lord used in John chapter 10, 28.

[27 : 21] Remember he said of his sheep, I give them eternal life and they will never perish. That's a very strong never. Never is more like no, not ever into eternity.

Absolutely not. Peter is saying the same thing to Jesus. You will never, if it takes eternally, absolutely not.

You will never, no, not ever, ever wash my feet. If the world ends, you will not wash my feet. That's how Jesus is speaking. That's how Peter is speaking to Jesus.

He forgot who the master was and who was the student. A case of temporary insanity brought on by a highly emotional moment.

But don't look at Peter sideways. Come on y'all, cut us some slack. Don't we do this? When we get very emotional about something, we tend to tell God what he's supposed to do.

[28 : 21] Or what not to do. or what we will or will not do. Emotions run high, right?

And we get, and we go to God with those high emotions and sometimes we speak out of turn. But see how gentle Jesus is with his big-hearted but wrong-headed disciple. He answers him, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me.

He didn't yell that. He said that softly to Peter but pointedly, pointedly. So Peter got that part. Hold it, hold it, I didn't mean it, Lord.

Hold it. Lord, not only my feet but only also my hands and my head. Lord, give me a bath. If it comes down to that, give me a bath.

Jesus says to him, the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet but it's completely clean. Peter didn't get it. I guarantee you didn't get it. You see, this reflects a Mediterranean custom.

[29 : 27] A person invited to a dinner party takes a bath at home or in the public baths before coming to a supper. Upon arrival, the individual needs only to have his feet washed before the meal.

That custom was about table fellowship. Peter likely thought that Jesus is saying you can't stay at this table unless I wash your feet.

He didn't get it. But Jesus is taking the custom and using it to illustrate a deeper truth. No share, he said. That is no inheritance like the land of Israel.

No inheritance. No share with me is what he's saying to Peter. Peter would have no part in glory if he would not humble himself to Jesus.

Jesus is going to say to them later, John 15, 3, already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

[30 : 24] The word. Why is the word cleansing? It's the cleansing power of the word because it is his word, it is connected with his coming death on the cross for his people's sins. His word is the gospel.

And they're clean because they have believed and trusted in him. So they've already been bathed in the word of the Lord, in the gospel of Christ, trusting in Jesus.

But they still live in the real world. And their feet get dirty. We're always stepping in something.

On the road to life, on our way to glory, on our way to heaven, we are walking through places that sometimes are not clean.

And our feet get dirty. We need forgiveness because we get dirty. We fall, sometimes we fall into the stuff that we're stepping in.

[31 : 30] Sometimes we just step in it. But either way, we've been soiled. But here's the beautiful thing. Improving our serve involves meditating on what Jesus has done for us more than what we can do for Jesus.

So we turn, we once again return to Jesus. When I step in something, I once again return to Jesus. And I do, and I fall into 1 John 1, 9, right? 1, 7 to 9. If we walk in the light, he is in the light.

We have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin. That's the Christian life. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

However, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He's washing our feet! If you deny that you sin, then you have no part with him.

Ah, but if you've been babed already, you know then, you know that you're still flawed and messed up a bit. And you know you must come to confess he's made provision for the sins we commit after we've been washed.

[32 : 48] Thank you, Jesus. And lastly, quickly, proving I serve means imitating Jesus. Oh my gosh. People don't like hearing that, but that's the truth. We're called to imitate Jesus. Now keep in mind, we can imitate him because he's already bathed us. His presence and power lives in us.

If anyone does not have the spirit of God, he's none of his. So you've been washed and his presence, his spirit lives in your heart, lives in you. Therefore, you are empowered to serve.

Empowered to serve, empowered to imitate. Now some people have taken this literally and they have feet washing services. Now, I think it's a beautiful thing by the way. I've done it many times over the years.

My wife and I have been a part of those services in different churches. It's a beautiful thing. But I don't think that's exactly what the Lord meant. Because you can do a ritual and still not have a servant's heart.

[33 : 55] I've known people who got up and cussed and swearing and were mad as hornets after they've washed feet. But once your heart has been washed by the blood of Jesus, the love of Jesus, the kindness and the grace and mercy of Jesus, he's empowering you to do as he has done.

Love your brothers and sisters to the end. Doing the lowly thing. The thing that nobody else will see. See, we don't mind serving sometimes as long as everybody sees us doing it.

We're going to put it on Instagram. We're going to put it on X. Hey, I was over there at the church there and I did this. What? Really? Oh, praise God, but really?

We want everybody to know. But listen, the servant doesn't care about the glory. The servant just wants the master to get the glory. The servant says, this is not about me.

It's about displaying the love of Jesus. We're going to talk more about that later. And Jesus says, it's not enough that you know you should be a servant.

[35 : 13] You're only blessed if you do it. You see the text? You're only blessed if you do it. I know I should serve the church. I know I should be using my gifts in the church.

I know I should be trying to get involved in the church. I know I should be caring for people that I see in my job or in my home or my neighborhood. I know I should care, but you know, I'm busy. I'm busy.

I was talking to someone recently and I reminded him that, you know, serving isn't always convenient. Jesus didn't serve when it's convenient.

Imitate me. You think it was convenient for him to become human and to let people walk all over him all the way to the cross? You think that was convenient? Sometimes service, sometimes your greatest service will be when nobody sees it and you have to go out of your way to do it.

That's when Jesus is great in you. Well, let me just wrap this up in a few concluding remarks. Jesus served his disciples because he saw how desperate and dirty we are in sin.

[36 : 39] his heart broke for us. He washed our souls and now he washes our feet in love and compassion. Maybe you are used to being served.

Maybe because of your socioeconomic standing, your ethnicity, whatever, maybe you're used to being served. Now, Jesus who served you is calling you to serve.

Not as a project, not to soothe your conscience, to make yourself feel good, he's calling you to serve as a way of life. He's calling you to be last, to serve joyfully because you know you're serving him first and foremost.

He's calling you to take the lower position sometimes, but doing it out of compassion to those who are hurting and desperate in your area. Maybe you're not used to being served.

You've had to scrap for everything you have. You've done all the serving and you've been taken advantage of maybe, taken for granted. Is this your time to demand your rights to be served?

[37 : 50] Imagine the disciples because of all the suffering their people had gone through at the hands of the Romans. Imagine them coming to Jesus and demanding he washed their feet. because of everything I've suffered.

Peter could have said, everything we've suffered as a people, you need to wash our feet, Jesus. No, there's no entitlement to service.

Service like love and forgiveness cannot be demanded. It can only be given. But as a disciple of Jesus, you now have a new reason to serve. A new reason.

Though you may feel that you've been serving and giving so much and may be taken advantage of, but now you have a new reason to serve. Now you have a reason to serve, to exalt him, to display his likeness and let him handle the fallout.

Let him handle your rights. And all of us have to remember, all of us have to remember, you are dirty.

[38 : 56] Your feet get dirty. All of us got dirty feet. And all of us need Jesus to wash us.

Otherwise, we're filthy. Without Jesus, without his washing love, family, I just gotta be honest, without him, we're filthy.

but with him, we are clean. Clean forever.

Clean. Can you hear that word over you? If you are in Christ, clean. Wash, whited in snow.

Rejoice. Now get out and serve. Father, thank you. Thank you for sending Jesus, the great servant, your servant, your suffering servant, as Isaiah calls him.

[40 : 01] Thank you for sending him who served even to the last. He loved us to the last. Help us to love one another to the last. Forgive us, Lord, for how our, sometimes our love just fails.

Lord, saturate us with your love. Remind us of your great love and our great inability to love. Remind us how dirty we were without Jesus.

And remind us that every day we need to come back for the cleansing of our feet. Because we step in stuff. Have mercy upon us and use us to serve.

In Jesus' name. Amen.