

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Loving To The Limit John 13:12-17 Part Three

We all appreciate being served. Certainly I can speak from experience. Many different people have served me in many different situations throughout my life and I am grateful for each one of those expressions.

I appreciate the way my father worked to supply for me. I appreciate the way my mother over the years sought to care for me. I appreciate my childhood friends and how they entertained me. I appreciate my grandmother and how she sought to spoil me. I appreciate my teachers and how they instructed me. I appreciate my coaches and the skills they gave me. And, of course, there is my wife, my children, my grandchildren and you who have served and continue to serve me in so many different ways right up to this very moment.

Do we appreciate being served? Of course we appreciate it! We all appreciate being served. But there is something that is even more blessed than being served. And what is that? It is serving. What did Jesus tell His disciples according to **Acts 20:35**? He told them that "**It is more blessed to give than receive.**"

Do you believe this? Hopefully your answer would be yes! I believe this! Now let me ask you a different question. To what extent do you believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive? In other words, how far are you willing to go in order to do this? How much of yourself are we willing to give in order to serve others?

Hopefully your answer would be that you are willing to give up a whole lot. In fact, I would hope by God's grace that you and I would be willing, if necessary, to give up our very own lives in the service of others. Why should we be willing to do this? This question brings us back to John's account of the foot washing in **John 13:1-17**.

We are presently breaking this passage down into three different parts. The first part that we considered two weeks ago was the love of Christ exemplified (John 13:1-6).

How was Christ's love exemplified? Christ's love was exemplified by the fact that even though it was only a matter of hours before He would be betrayed and crucified, Christ took the time to wash His disciples' feet, not only demonstrating, but symbolically illustrating the fact He loved His disciples and He loved them to the end.

This is a wonderful truth. It is a truth that should even now bring us, as disciples of Christ, a wonderful sense of comfort. Jesus loves us and will, in any and every circumstance, love us to the very end. So, what was the first part of John's account of the foot washing? Christ's love exemplified.

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And what was the second part of John's account of the foot washing that we considered last week? The love of Christ explained (John 13:6-11).

Hopefully in this section of Scripture you remember that when Jesus came to Peter and sought to wash his feet that Peter protested. And how did Jesus initially respond to that protest? Jesus initially responded by telling Peter, in **John 13:7**, "**What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.**"

So, what was Jesus trying to communicate to Peter? Jesus, in **John 13:7**, was simply trying to communicate to Peter and to the rest of the disciples that they would not be able to understand the symbolic significance of the foot washing when it worked itself out in a matter of a few hours, but they would understand it later. In other words, Jesus, in **John 13:7**, was simply trying to communicate to Peter and the rest of the disciples that when the atonement took place and their sins were washed away in the blood of cross, they would not be able to initially appreciate what had happened nor how it had been symbolically pictured for them in the foot washing, but it wouldn't be long until all of this would become clear to them.

After this there was a dialogue between Peter and Christ that eventually brought Peter to a point of submission where, though he may not have yet understood the symbolism of this particular expression of love, or in other words the symbolism of the foot washing, he was willing to submit himself to it.

Hopefully this is something we would also be willing to do as well. Hopefully we, like Peter, would be willing to submit ourselves to Christ and His various expressions of love for us even if we do not specifically understand what He is trying to accomplish through the various circumstances that He permitting to come into our lives.

Does Jesus love us? Yes! Will Jesus love us to the end? Yes! Will He love us perfectly to the end even if we are having difficulty understanding the good that He is seeking to accomplish through the circumstances that He is allowing to come into our lives? Yes!

This brings us to the third part of John's account of the foot washing. The third part of John's account of the foot washing is the love of Christ exhorted (John 13:12-17).

My hope for this message is that we might better understand the blessedness of serving. My hope for this message is that we might better understand the blessedness of serving no matter what the personal cost might be to us during the course of our earthly life.

Let us begin with **verse 12**. "**And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'**"

Now isn't this an interesting question that Jesus asked His disciples in light of what He had just said to Peter in **John 13:7**. And what had Jesus said to Peter?

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Let me once again read that verse for you, "**Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.'**" So if Jesus, while seeking to wash Peter's feet, told Peter in **John 13:7** that he would not understand what He was about to do, then why in the world would Christ now in **John 13:12** ask the disciples including Peter, "**Do you know what I have done?**"

What on the surface might seem a little bit confusing is not confusing at all. Jesus, in **John 13:12**, was not talking about the same thing as He was in **John 13:7**.

Jesus' statement in John 13:7 was focusing on the symbolism of the foot washing while Jesus' question in John 13:12 was focusing on the example of the foot washing.

So, what did the foot washing symbolize? The foot washing symbolized the atonement of Christ when the blood of Christ's cross would wash away the guilt of our sin.

Could His disciples at that time understand the symbolism of the foot washing? No! And that was Jesus point in **John 13:7**, but though they might not be able to understand the symbolism of the foot washing at that particular point in time, they could to some degree at least understand the example that Jesus had provided them, and this is inferred by the question that He asked them in **John 13:12**. Why did Jesus change the focus of the foot washing?

Jesus wanted, in John 3:12, the disciples to ponder His example in order that He might personally challenge them. This is why. With this in mind let us now read John 13:13. "**You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am.**" Jesus, by this statement, is reminding His disciples of their relationship to Him. And He did this, first of all, by reminding them how they addressed Him and how they referred to Him. So, what was the first way they addressed or referred to Him?

They, first of all, addressed Him or referred to Him as teacher. "The term "Teacher" (DIDASKOLOS) was a term of respect and was a equivalent to the term "Rabbi." And how else did they address Him or refer to Him? They also addressed Him or referred to Him as Lord. The term "Lord" (KYRIOS) covered everything from polite respect, like our modern "sir," to an acknowledgment of God Himself. So if this is true, then how did the disciples understand their use of the term "Lord" when addressing or referring to Jesus?

In light of the fact that the disciples had already confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God, it would seem that we would have to infer that when the disciples used the term "Lord" to address or to refer to Jesus, that they used it much more than as just a term of polite respect. But it is also clear that they most likely had not yet come to the place where they were fully convinced that He was necessarily God incarnate either. The truth is that their use of the word "Lord" in addressing or referring to Christ most likely at this point in time fell somewhere between simply being a polite expression of respect and an acknowledgement that Christ was God incarnate. But even though this term fell somewhere in between polite respect and an acknowledgement of Christ as God incarnate, these terms taken together in addressing or referring to Jesus certainly set Jesus apart in the disciples minds from every other person in authority.

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Therefore, when Christ reminded His disciples, in John 13:13, how they addressed Him and referred to Him, He was reminding them of the authoritative and exalted position He held over them. So where will Jesus go from here? After establishing the type of relationship He had with His disciples, He is now going to present to them a challenge based on the example He presented to them in washing their feet.

Let us now read **John 13:14-15.** "**If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.**" So, what was the challenge that Jesus presented to His disciples in light of the fact that He held an authoritative and exalted position over them?

Jesus, in light of the authoritative and exalted position He held over them, exhorted His disciples to wash one another's feet just as He washed their feet (John 13:14-15).

Now let me ask you a question. When Jesus commanded His disciples to wash one another's feet, was His intent to institutionalize foot washing as a church ritual? If our answer to this question is yes then we should have a stack of wash basins at the door along with towels and a supply of water so that we might from time to time do the very thing that Christ commanded His disciples to do here in **John 13:14-15.** But obviously since you don't see those kinds of supplies here in our church, I believe that you can safely assume that we do not believe that when Christ commanded His disciples to wash one another's feet that it was His intent to institutionalize foot washing.

Why don't we? The reason is very simple. Nowhere else in the New Testament, or in the earliest extra-biblical documents of the church, is foot washing treated as an ecclesiastical rite.

Well, if Christ did not intend for His command to be understood in this way, then how did He want His command to be understood?

When Jesus commanded His disciples, in light of His example, to wash one another's feet, He was calling His disciples to imitate His life of humble and sacrificial service. Isn't this exactly what Jesus was doing?

Now let me ask you a question. If Christ wants us to emulate His own life of humble service, does this mean that Christ wants us to love others without limit and without any regard to what it might cost us personally? And what is the answer? The answer would have to be yes!

Let me read for you **Philippians 2:3-8.** "**Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**"

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When Christ calls us to imitate His life of service, He is calling us to serve others without limit and without any regard for our own personal interests (Philippians 2:3-8).

Now, it might be true that we may have a difficulty managing the number of opportunities the Lord has given us to serve one another in light of the fact that we are finite and our resources are finite, but even though we might be challenged in this way, we should always be willing to completely give ourselves up in serving others within the limits of our finiteness. Now at this point you might be saying to yourself, "I would rather model myself after some worldly philanthropist who is only willing to serve others out of their excess." You might think to yourself that this would be far more preferable than following the example of Christ.

And of course we would certainly all have to agree that this would be easier. This way we would only have to serve others after we had served ourselves. This way we would only have to expand the time, energy and resources that were left over after taking care of our own needs and wants.

This approach, which I have called the "worldly philanthropist approach," in a nutshell is simply saying, "I am committed to serving but only after I have made sure that all of my needs have been met." "I am willing to give but I am willing only to give whatever is convenient for me out of my excess."

Would approaching our service in this way make our service to others easier? Absolutely! But this is not the way of Christ. When Christ came into this world He devoted Himself to a life of service without limit and without any regard to His own personal interests.

If Christ was willing to devote Himself to a life of humble service and sacrificial service, without any regard for Himself, then we, as His disciples, should do the same (John 13:16). And this is the point of the very next verse.

Let me read for you **John 13:16. "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."** If the slave is not greater than his master, and the master becomes a slave, then where does this put the slave? It puts him on the same level as his master.

When Jesus exhorted His disciples to wash one another's feet, He was not so much pushing them down as much as He was lifting them up. He had, in effect, by the way He had chosen to live His life, dignified a life devoted to sacrifice and service. Jesus, in becoming the servant in a very real sense, had made sacrifice and serving a truly regal exercise and exercise with great value.

So, now let me ask you a question. Is our participation in this regal exercise of serving one another without hesitation and without limits a blessed thing? Let us now read **John 13:17. "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."**

Jesus, in John 13:17, makes it clear that those disciples who know of Christ's example and imitates Christ's example should consider themselves blessed.

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In what way should those disciples who know about Christ's example and imitate Christ's example consider themselves blessed?

Those who know of Christ's example and who imitate Christ's example are blessed because they prove that they are in fact true disciples rather than simply pseudo disciples. Isn't this, in essence, the same truth that James shares with us in James 2:14-17? "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body [or in other words, they do not take the time to wash their feet], what use is that? (16) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

When Christ called us to follow Him, He did not call us to an easy life. He called us to take up our cross and to follow Him (Matthew 16:24).

Let me read for you **Matthew 16:24. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me."** So let me ask you, what is this cross that Christ has asked us to pick up? The cross that Christ asked us to pick up is a life devoted to humble sacrificial service. And it certainly is not easy. That is why Jesus called it our cross.

If we can always keep this before us, this will mean that when our wife is in need, we will be willing to give her whatever we are capable of giving her, without any regard for ourselves. It will mean when our husband is in need, we will be willing to give to him whatever we are capable of giving to him, without any regard to ourselves. It will mean that when our parents or our children are in need, we will be willing to give them whatever we are capable of giving them, without any regard for ourselves. It means that if our church is in need, we will be willing to give to our church whatever we are capable of giving to our church, without any regard for ourselves.

So, what is the payoff for us if we, in obedience to Christ, follow His example of humble and sacrificial service? If we, in obedience to Christ, follow His example of humble and sacrificial service, we will one day exchange our cross for a crown.

Do we appreciate being served? Of course we appreciate it! We all appreciate being served. But there is something that is even more blessed than being served. And what is that? It is serving.

May God give us the grace to serve others with the same heart of compassion as Christ.