

# John 13:17

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Amen. This morning we will be ordaining and inducting three new deacons to serve within the congregation.

We thank God for Rob and Samuel and David. The word deacon is derived from a Greek word that we find in the New Testament, the word diakonos, a word that simply means servant.

And so in the basic sense and meaning of the word diakonos, all believers are deacons, all are servants in that sense of the word. We are all called as believers to serve God and to serve others. What do we make of this matter of serving others? Is serving others a bind or a blessing?

Is it a joy or a pain? I think it's very important that Bonacord's new and old deacons, not very old, but current deacons, shall we say, serve joyfully. I was just noticing the questions that we're going to pose to Rob and Samuel and David in a few moments. And I was intrigued by the final question, and I'll just intimate now what it is, and you'll hear it again a little later. Do you accept the office of a deacon of this congregation and promise through grace faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully to discharge all the duties thereof? Cheerfully. Isn't it interesting that in that question that that word is introduced? I think it's great that it is to serve God cheerfully, to serve others joyfully? That is what we need to do, the deacons and indeed all believers. Such servants will be effective. Such service will be fruitful. I wonder, do we whistle or do we whine as we work for the Lord?

It's a question for all of us to just ponder on for a moment. Are you a whistler or a whiner? Whistle while you work or whine while you work? Where do you fit in in that spectrum? Jesus calls us to blessed or joyful service. Now, if joyful service is something that you're drawn to, if you say, well, that's the kind of service I would like to give, and it would be surely quite perverse to prefer joyless service, then listen carefully to what God has to say to you in His Word this morning.

[ 2 : 52 ]     In John chapter 13, the verses that we've read, we have an account, a very familiar record of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, an account that ends with a wonderful promise. There at the very end of the section that we've read in verse 17, we read, now that you know these things, Jesus speaking to His disciples, speaking to us, now that you know these things, you will be blessed, you will be happy, you will be joyful if you do them. A great promise that is given to us today, a promise of blessedness or happiness in the service of God. Given the prize and the promise, if we can call it that, it's important that we have a clear understanding of this promise made by Jesus to us. And let's just begin there by thinking a little bit about this promise, and from there it will enable us to launch into other aspects of the passage, and in due course I'll explain which of these we're going to be giving particular attention to this morning. But first of all, this promise, they're right at the end of the account. The first thing that we can say and that we need to say and notice is that it is a conditional promise. There is an if there. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

There is a condition to be met if we are to experience and enjoy the blessedness promised. And the condition, it's very evident, it's very clear there. You will be blessed if you do them. Well, I say it's very clear, but perhaps not so. What is it that we need to do in order to fulfill this condition? What is Jesus referring to when he says, you will be blessed if you do them? Well, we don't need to search very far.

In that same verse, we're told that what he is referring to is or are these things. Verse 17, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. So the them refers back to these things. Well, that takes us a little bit down the road, but it still doesn't altogether clarify things for us because the obvious question then is, well, what are these things that we need to do? Well, from verse 17 alone, they are things that the disciples know, and importantly, they are things that can be done. These are things that you can do. You will be blessed if you do them. Well, then this leads us one step further backwards, certainly backwards in the text, to verse 15. But I think we begin to identify what these things are. What do we read there in verse 15? Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and he says, I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. And then he goes on, and I think it's very clear that when he goes on to say that you have to do these things, he is referring to what he has done for you. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. If we do these things, we will be blessed. We will be happy deacons, happy servants of a God.

So having established that, we now have a two-fold task. First of all, to identify those things that Jesus has done for us, those things spoken of and demonstrated particularly in our passage, those things that Jesus has done for us, and also, and importantly, but much more briefly, to also consider how we can do them for others, and consequently, discover or experience the blessedness that is promised there at the very end of the passage. First of all, then, let's think about Jesus as our example in doing these things, these things. Now, in considering Jesus as our example, we're going to give attention to three aspects of what he has done for us highlighted in the passage.

First of all, we're going to try to identify Jesus's basic motivation to do what he does. I think we'll find that it is there mentioned very clearly, his basic motivation to do what he does. We're also going to look to identify what I'm calling, it's maybe a bit wordy, and perhaps I could have found a better way of describing it, but nonetheless, we're going to try and identify the underlying character and unifying characteristic of what he does, of what Jesus does. And then, finally, to notice his concrete acts of service on our behalf. So, his motivation, the underlying character or unifying characteristic of what he does, but then also the concrete acts of service done by Jesus on our behalf.

[ 8 : 23 ] First of all, his basic motivation for doing what he does. Now, we began at the end, just to be contrary. We began at the very end of the account with the promise, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. But now, in considering Jesus's basic motivation for doing what he does, we need to rewind to the very beginning of the account and to verse 1. We read there, it was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave the world and go to the Father. And then we read, having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. So, before we were given this description of what he does, we're given an inkling as to what it is symbolizing, what it is pointing forwards to, we're told very clearly that at the heart of all this, that which underpins all that Jesus does, the foundation of what Jesus does is the love that he bears to his own. Having loved his own, he now showed them the full extent of his love. So, if we were to ask the question, what's love got to do with it? Well, the answer is everything. Everything Jesus does is grounded in and motivated by love.

And we can develop this a little further by identifying two characteristics of this love that John explicitly highlights. This love of Jesus as directed love and also as extravagant love.

What do we mean by describing the love of Jesus in those two ways? Well, when we say that it is directed love, we're drawing attention to what John says there in the second half of verse 1.

And having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. This love that has been spoken of is directed love. It is directed towards his own. We can say with great confidence and grounded in Scripture that God loves everybody. There's a very real and genuine sense in which God loves everybody. But it's also true that he has a particular love for his own. There is what we might call a covenant love that he bears towards his own in a very particular way. And it is of this love that John is speaking. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them, the full extent of his love. This love is directed in love. But it's also extravagant love. The language that John uses to describe the love of Jesus as it is about to be expressed is extravagant language to describe extravagant love. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Or as it's sometimes translated, perhaps more vividly, he loved them to the uttermost.

He loved them to the uttermost. Or he loved them to the end. I think the idea isn't so much chronological, but in terms of the depth and quality of his love. He loved them to the uttermost.

[ 11 : 50 ] This is the motivation that lies behind the acts of service that we find described in this chapter.

Now remember, as we're noticing all these things, let's never forget that our purpose in identifying these things is to return in due course to the promise that Jesus ends the passage with, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Our purpose isn't only to admire Jesus. It's a good thing to do that, but our purpose is to understand and to discover what he is like and what he has done that we might follow his example and in so doing be blessed. So with that reminder in view, let's move on. First of all, we've noticed then that the motivation for Jesus doing what he does and it is motivated by love. But secondly, the underlying character and unifying characteristic of what he does. What I'm trying to express or do here is look behind the concrete actions, such as the washing of the disciples' feet, and identify the underlying character or unifying characteristic of all that Jesus does. And I can try and capture it in this way.

All that Jesus does for us is done in humble submission and in costly self-sacrifice. In humble submission and costly self-sacrifice, his whole mission, the eternal plan of salvation conceived in eternity involved and required the humble submission and costly self-sacrifice of the Son of Jesus.

He is the one who emptied himself. He is the one who stooped to serve. He is the one who handed himself over to death on the cross. A helpful way of reading this account of the feet washing is to see it as John presenting in pictorial and dramatic language what Paul expresses in more theological language in Philippians chapter 2 and verses 5 to 11. They're not strictly speaking a parallel passage in the way that we speak of parallel passages from one gospel to another, but in a sense we could reasonably call them parallel passages. And let's just quickly read what Paul says in Philippians chapter 2 and verses 5 to 11. And what I'm suggesting is that in many ways what Paul is saying is the same, but the language he uses is more theological than John who uses a real-life example to get across the same basic fundamental truths concerning the person of Jesus. Philippians chapter 2 and verse 5, your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Notice, even as we introduce this reading, that the purpose of identifying what Jesus is like is that we would be like him. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. With this language of Jesus emptying himself, of making himself nothing, of divesting himself of his glory, with this language in mind, and conscious that John often employs symbolism to convey what he has to say, we can notice an interesting use of a verb that we find in our passage in John chapter 13, particularly there in verse 4 where we have this account of washing the disciples' feet, and as Jesus prepares to do so, what do we read? So he got up from the meal,

Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist, and then it goes on. But the verb there translated, he took off his outer clothing, he laid aside his outer clothing, that's what he did, simply a description of what he did in order to wash the disciples' feet. But John uses that same verb in chapter 10 of his gospel and in verse 18 in a different context. And while we need to be careful about not reading in a meaning that isn't intended, I wonder whether in actual fact there is something that we can draw from this. In John chapter 10 and verse 18, listen to what Jesus says, No one takes it from me. He's talking about his own life. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father. And the word there that's translated lay it down is the same verb that is used by John here in speaking of John divesting himself, laying down, taking off his outer garment.

[17:29] Curiously, in the same context of Jesus being recognized as having authority. But even though he has authority that has been given to him, he is willing to divest himself, to lay down that which is rightly his. I wonder if we can detect what we're calling a unifying characteristic that underpins all that Jesus does. In his incarnation, he divests himself of his glory. He empties himself. He makes himself as nothing. In his death, he divests himself of life itself. And in the washing of the disciples' feet, an act of loving service in its own right, Jesus acts out what his whole life and mission involves, divesting himself, divesting himself or laying aside his own rights and prerogatives in humble submission and costly self-sacrifice. And he does so in the full knowledge of what we're told in verse 3 of our passage. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. He knows who he is. He knows what authority he commands. And knowing these things, he takes off his outer garment. He fills the bowl with water and washes his disciples' feet. Before moving on, we do need to draw out one further important truth, the lordship and authority of Jesus, something that Jesus himself explicitly highlights in verse 14 as he applies what he's done to the disciples. Now that I, your lord and teacher, I am that. It's right that you call me that. So he highlights his authority. But that authority, that lordship, that authority is derived from his humble submission and costly self-sacrifice.

And this is echoed very clearly in Philippians, in the passage that we've read. It was because Jesus became obedient unto death that the Father highly exalted him. It was a very significant therefore in that passage in Philippians. Therefore God exalted him. Therefore because he humbled himself, because he emptied himself, because he submitted to the Father's will and served others. That is why the Father exalted him to the highest place. And so this is a fundamental feature, characteristic of Jesus' life and mission. So we've thought a little bit about his motivation for doing what he does.

We've tried to identify this unifying characteristic of what he does. But then thirdly, his concrete acts of service on our behalf. Now we've touched on them already, but let's now consider them a little more carefully. We can classify chronologically Jesus' acts of service described or alluded to in our passage. Those performed in the past, the present, and the imminent future. But notice that these time references are based on verse 1 of chapter 13 being the present. So not our present, but the present as it was at the time being described. It was just before the Passover feast. That's the present we're thinking about. And we want to see how Jesus' acts of service mentioned or alluded to in the passage can be seen from the past, the present as in then, and the imminent future. First of all, in the past, John alludes to acts of loving service performed by Jesus in the past. There in verse 1, he says, having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

John is very conscious that he has experienced himself the love of Jesus in the past, in those times that they had walked together and served together. And we can imagine that John has in mind the multiple ways in which Jesus showed his love to his disciples as they ministered together, his words of encouragement and instruction, his miracles of healing, his patience and sensitivity, and no doubt we could go on. Looking at the bigger picture, we could point to the incarnation itself as a powerful demonstration of Jesus having loved his own. But then we move into the present, the present of the account. In verse 1, John goes on to say, he now showed them the full extent of his love, now in their present. This, in the first instance, though by no means exhaustively, as we'll see in a moment, refers to the washing of the disciples' feet. This is how Jesus in the present, in their present, showed his love for them. This act of Jesus, of washing the disciples' feet, can be and ought to be understood at two levels, both of which point to his love for his disciples. Washing his disciples' feet was in and of itself, and we mustn't lose sight of this, in and of itself, it was an act of humble and costly service designed to provide for the disciples' physical cleaning and comfort. And in this way, he showed the love that he bore towards them. But it was also the washing of their feet. It was also clearly intended. Jesus explicitly states this as a symbolic act, pointing to both the need for and the availability of spiritual cleansing from Jesus, secured by sacrificial service on the part of Jesus.

The protest of Peter and the ensuing dialogue makes this very clear, that this is in mind in Jesus, as he does what he does. In verse 8, when Peter protests, how does he respond? Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. In verse 10, Jesus answered, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. His whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you.

[ 24 : 14 ] And again, it is very clear that Jesus here is speaking beyond the physical cleaning of their feet, important though that was in its own right. And so in the present, in their present, Jesus engages in this concrete act of loving service.

But then there's also what we're calling the imminent future. Jesus here is acting in the shadow of Calvary. We know this from the chronology of the events, but it's also explicitly stated there at the very beginning. It was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. And so what Jesus does is in the shadow of Calvary, Jesus knew that the hour had come. Then in our version it says the time had come, but that takes away a little bit of the drama of what was stated by John. It's the hour. The hour had come. The hour that he had come for. The hour that he had anticipated. The hour had come. And he acts in the shadow of that hour. The hour of his death. And washing the disciples' feet served as one step in the direction of the cross and was motivated by the same love that would hold him on the cross. It pointed forward to the supreme act of submission and sacrificial and loving service demonstrated at Calvary. Indeed, the cross is very much included in the now of verse 1. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. So this is our example. And recognizing that here we have our example, we listen again to what Jesus says to us in verse 15. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

And having done that, having sought to identify what he has done for us, these things that Jesus goes on to make reference to in the promise in verse 17. We can, really by way of conclusion, though it would merit more time being spent on it, consider how we can do them. How we can do these things as we are exhorted to do and as we are given this great promise concerning, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. We can employ the same categories as we consider this call to emulate or follow the example of Jesus, namely our motivation in serving, the unifying characteristic of our service, and our concrete acts of service on behalf of others. First of all, what about our motivation?

Well, it must be the same motivation that we find in Jesus. Love is the motivation for Jesus, and it must be our motivation also. On the centrality of love, Jesus is explicit in this same episode of teaching his disciples. In the very same chapter, we only need to turn the page to verses 34 and 35. We read, And you command, I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

And he goes on. We love because he first loved us. We serve because he first served us. We wash feet because he first washed our feet. For us, an understanding and growing appreciation of the love with which we are loved is essential if we, in turn, are to love others and be motivated by love to serve others. In the absence of love, feet washing is just not going to happen. It's just not going to happen.

[ 28 : 23 ] Our motivation. The unifying characteristic of our service, well, again, it ought to be no different to Jesus. He is our example. All we do must also be done in humble submission and in costly self-sacrifice.

As with Jesus, it is that, in turn, that grants us power and authority. On this, all but very particularly those who are in leadership should take note. Our authority is grounded in the measure that we, like Jesus, serve in humble submission and in costly self-sacrifice. In the absence of that, there is also an absence of spiritual authority. But then also concrete actions. In this, we also are to follow the example of Jesus while recognizing that there's not a symmetrical or exact correspondence between the acts of service of Jesus. We are not called, thank God, to die an atoning death. It's not the only thing we could do anyway. But we are called to take up our cross. We are called to die to self. We are called to give ourselves, even our very lives, in the service of others. We are called to wash feet. We must not shy away from what others might see as demeaning or menial acts of service. Nothing is below us. If we take seriously what Jesus is saying to us, we have to conclude that nothing, no act of service, nothing is below us.

If we were in any doubt, then surely that the argument Jesus himself employs in this passage is a powerful one in verse 13. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. And what will be the outcome of following the example that Jesus has set us? Well, that takes us really back to where we began. It takes us to the promise that we find at the end of our passage. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. The outcome is that we will be blessed. The outcome is that we will know happiness in our service of God. The outcome is that we can serve God cheerfully, in the language of the questions that you'll hear posed just in a few moments. We will serve God and others with joy. Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your Word. We thank you for the promises that we find in your Word, and we thank you very especially for this promise that we've given some thought to this morning, that if we do these things, if we do those things that you have done, if we follow your example, we will be blessed in so doing. We pray that we would experience in greater measure the blessing that comes from following your example, from doing those things that you have given us to do. We do thank you for the great love that we discover and grow to better understand that you have for us. And we pray that we might, in some measure, reflect that love in our service of others. Forgive us that we fall so very, very far short in this regard. And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.