

Loved to the end

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[0:00] Let's pray. Father, as we come to this passage now, I pray, Lord, that you would speak to us. I pray, Lord, that you would speak to us.

Help us to come to terms with what you are saying here. Help us to hear the gospel afresh. And may your spirit bring that gospel of yours and touch our hearts again.

So that we might truly worship our Lord Jesus and be so grateful for all that he has done. Please be with me and help me to speak clearly and faithfully.

Pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen. Now some of you will know that I have three older siblings. But that I basically grew up almost like an only child.

That's because they were all away at boarding school in Singapore. But there was one year when my brother had finished A-levels and was just waiting to begin university in the UK.

[1:08] Which meant he was home for nearly nine months. And I really loved that. I now had an actual brother around.

Someone to play badminton and computer games with. Someone I could ask for help. But I knew the day was coming when he would have to go off again.

Yet month after month, I would say to myself, At least that day isn't here yet. At least that day isn't here yet.

Until that day finally came. And the first night after my brother left was Quiet.

Strange. Lonely. Suddenly I had to learn again what life was like without him around. In John 13, the disciples are about to face that same kind of moment.

[2:18] For three years they have traveled with Jesus, eaten with him, watched him perform miracles, listened to his teaching. He's been their teacher, their leader, their friend.

But now, John tells us, the countdown clock has hit zero. The hour has come for Jesus to leave this world and return to his father.

But before he goes, Jesus leaves them with a parting gift. In John 13 verse 31 onwards, all the way to the end of John 16, he teaches them one last time.

And then in John chapter 17, he prays for them. And John makes sure we get the eavesdrop of what he says. Now that is striking when we zoom out and look at the bigger picture of John.

You see, if you were to read John 12, where Jesus enters Jerusalem, and then jumps straight to John 18, where he is arrested, the story would still make sense.

[3:34] In fact, the plot would move even faster. But John doesn't move straight from chapter 12 to chapter 18. Instead, he lets us sit in the room and listen to Jesus' final conversation with his disciples on the night before the cross.

Why? There can only be one reason. We need to hear these words just as much as they did.

After all, are we not in the same position as them? You see, in today's passage, the disciples don't yet realize Jesus is leaving.

But by next week, they certainly do. That's when they'll start getting a little confused and desperate and begin asking questions like, Jesus, where are you going?

And if you are leaving, what's going to happen to us? How are we supposed to follow you when you're not even here anymore? And aren't those the same questions we ask too?

[4:52] After all, today, Jesus is not physically here with us. He has returned to heaven. So how are we supposed to follow him?

How do we live as his disciples in a world where we cannot see him or hear him physically or walk alongside him? Well, that's exactly why John 13 to 17 is in our Bibles.

In these chapters, Jesus prepares his followers for life after his departure. But maybe you're asking, well, why is Jesus even leaving anyway?

Surely if he loved his disciples, he would stay. Well, that's what today is all about. And believe it or not, it's all to do with love.

In fact, verse 1 states it up front. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the very end.

[6:01] Or as the commentator, Hermann Ritterbos, breathlessly puts it, Jesus loved them to his very last last breath and with his fullest intensity.

And that is why he's going, even as he prepares them. So let us see how that is the case. This morning, we'll walk through this passage in three movements.

First, we'll see Jesus' love displayed as Jesus kneels to wash his disciples' feet. Then second, we'll see his love denied as one of those same disciples rises to betray him.

And third, we'll see his love exemplified as Jesus calls his followers to live out that same self-giving love toward one another. So firstly, love displayed, which is where we'll spend the most time today. Now, I want you to imagine that you're the most powerful person in the world. You are the big boss. As soon as you say something, tons of people will rush around trying to get it done.

[7:18] Now, how are you going to use all that power? Now, if it was me, to put it simply, I'll just use it to make my life as simple as possible.

I mean, after all, you're telling me that I have the power now to get someone to sort out all my laundry without having to do it myself. I have the ability to summon people to prepare all the meals that I want and to wash the dishes afterwards.

Wow, I'm definitely going to be using my power to do OTAP. Oh, sure, you know, I'm not an evil dictator, so I'll use some of that power to do a little bit of charity on the side.

But really, my main concern is to outsource all the friction and the inconveniences of daily life so that I can kick back and relax.

Well, guess what? Jesus is well aware the Father has handed him the keys to everything. Look at the beginning of verse 3.

[8:22] Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. That's his status, his identity.

He is equal with God, after all. As John has reminded us at the very start of his Gospel, Jesus is the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word is God.

So given that there's an evening meal currently taking place, how should the Almighty God behave? Call for a bigger portion of that yummy chicken? Ask to be first in line for seconds? Well, look at verse 4.

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

[9:34] So picture the scene. Jesus and his friends are reclining on their sides with their legs pointed away from the table, which is how you ate in those days.

Then Jesus begins to lay aside his outer garments and takes a towel to tie around his waist. A little bit like a doctor wearing scrubs as he gets ready for work.

Except, this isn't the dress code of a doctor. This is the dress code of a lowly slave. So you can imagine Jesus' disciples looking at Jesus and then looking at each other because what in the world is Jesus doing?

And John deliberately slows this part of the story down because he wants us to watch Jesus. He wants us to feel the wake of his actions as we watch him move around the table, one disciple at a time, washing their feet.

You see, Jesus isn't just putting on the appearance of a servant. He's actually doing the work of one. In those days, washing feet was a job for the lowest of the low.

[11:10] In fact, even Jewish slaves weren't typically allowed to do this. Only the Gentile ones. Because the job of foot washing was just too demeaning.

I mean, just imagine that you have been walking on the logging roads of Upper Baram. Especially after a week of monsoon rain where it gets all mucky and sludgy.

And remember that you're not walking in boots but in open-toed sandals. Now imagine, finally, reaching a house and then someone coming out and bending down and washing your feet after all of that for you.

That's basically what it would have been like given the disciples have been walking all over the dusty, muddy roads of Jerusalem. And the person doing this is Jesus.

And the Holy Spirit in inspiring John to record all this detail made sure we are getting this. And I want you to notice that little word at the very beginning of verse 4.

[12:27] sow. And then check out the flow from verses 3 to 4. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God so he got up and washed their feet.

In other words, John isn't saying, wow, Jesus washed the disciples' feet despite being the one with all power, despite being God himself. No.

That's not what he's saying. This is the logic instead. It is because Jesus is God that he washes their feet. This is the feature of Jesus being God, not a bug.

Because Jesus is God, that's precisely why he washes his feet. You see, my friends, I wonder, what is your image of God?

Do you think of him like an absentee landlord? You know, the guy who owns the place but is generally distant? Who only shows up when it's time to collect the rent but will never be involved in the nitty-gritty of your life?

[13:51] Or do you think of him like a divine quality controller who inspects your product as it rolls off the factory line, ready to reject any offering of yours that is a little bit imperfect, ready to jump and complain on any perceived defects?

Or perhaps you think of him like the emergency services. You call him when you're having a heart attack but not for minor problems like dirty smelly feet.

Surely you don't need him then? But John says this is what God is like. He is a humble servant washing your feet.

And we know this for sure because we are watching Jesus and he is the true image of God. But you know what?

Jesus isn't merely teaching us a moral lesson at this point. He is not just saying, oh, you know what? Let's all be like me. Let's all be humble. He's doing more than that.

[15:06] You see, this foot washing is really an acted parable of the cross. How can we be so sure? There are a few clues.

Firstly, did you notice what time it is? Verse 1 tells us it's Passover time. And that is not just a date on the calendar. Throughout John's Gospel, Passover acts as the interpretive lens for Jesus' death. Passover in the book of Exodus, a lamb was sacrificed and its blood saved God's people from judgment. And from the very beginning of this Gospel, Jesus has been identified as the Lamb of God.

So when John says Passover is near, he's quietly reminding us the true Passover sacrifice is about to take place.

And if we are still not sure, then I think verse 1 all but confirms this with mention of the hour. Look back at John 12, verse 23 to 24, for instance, and Jesus makes clear this hour refers to the hour of his glorification, which is when he dies.

[16:34] But here is the biggest clue, the exchange between Peter and Jesus in verses 6 to 11. Did you notice Peter's reaction to what's happening?

When Jesus reaches him, he can't take it anymore, verse 6. Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Surely not.

This is an outrage. Now, on one level, we might admire Peter's instinct here. Isn't there something almost reverent about it?

Surely it's wrong for the master to serve the servant. Surely it should be the other way around. But notice how Jesus replies, verse 7, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

now that is a big flashing neon sign, isn't it? That this foot washing is about more than just feet. For Jesus is saying there is something bigger going on, something you might not get now, but you will get later.

[17:50] And verse 8 helps us understand what that bigger thing is. Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.

In other words, Jesus is saying, Peter, this isn't optional. You don't get to refuse. Unless I wash you and cleanse you, you can't be forgiven and brought back to God.

And that can only happen when I die on the cross. That is what the foot washing is pointing towards. Jesus humbling himself to cleanse his disciples because we cannot clean ourselves. It's his love on display. And my friends, that is exactly what the cross is about. It's not a moral example we follow primarily.

It is not an inspiration from a distance, but it is something Jesus does for us, to us, that we receive, or we have no part with him at all.

[19:07] And sometimes, if we are honest, we don't like that. Because if Jesus is right, he's not simply saying we are a little grubby on the outside, rather, he's saying we are pretty dirty on the inside.

All of us. And we can't do anything about it. And that is deeply uncomfortable to admit. Just think about how uncomfortable it can feel when someone does something that leaves you knowing that you are totally helpless to change the situation.

maybe someone insists on paying when you can't afford the meal. Maybe someone steps in to fix a mess you have created.

And when someone does that, sometimes you feel exposed. Because accepting that help means admitting something that we don't like to admit.

I can't handle this on my own. And many of us would rather struggle quietly than receive help that humbles us.

[20:25] But Jesus says the only way to be in his kingdom is if you let him wash you. In other words, you have to admit that you can't fix your own heart.

You have to admit you are dirty on the inside. You have to admit that you can't really change who you really are. Not on your own. You need cleansing.

You need repairing. You need him. That's the prerequisite. To serve Jesus, you must let yourself first be served by Jesus.

Otherwise, your service is just another form of shiok sendiri. Now, Peter, to his credit, is at least beginning to understand that being washed by Jesus is essential.

Which is why he says, verse 9, that, Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. But he doesn't fully get it.

[21:30] And so Jesus responds in verse 10 with something that, at first glance, seems slightly confusing. 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. And the key to understanding this verse is to understand Jesus is moving on to make a slightly different point. He is saying, when you first put your trust in Jesus, you are fully, completely, finally washed clean, once and for all.

Like when you have a proper bath. As Jesus would later cry out from the cross, it is finished. And so every time you mess up, it's not like you have stopped being a Christian.

You haven't moved back into the not-Christian category, waiting to earn your way back into the Christian category again. But that is often how many of us think, even if subconsciously, don't we?

[22:47] How many of you, the moment you sinned, thought, oh, I'm not safe anymore? How many of you felt like you had to start all over again, as if you are not a Christian all over again?

Jesus says that's not how it works. When you are safe, you have had a proper full bath. you are clean. But here is where Jesus develops his point.

For he also says, it is true, life this side of heaven still gets messy. You still sin. The full bath doesn't mean your feet will never get dirty again.

That's why you still need to wash your feet. sin. In other words, every time you sin, you still need to come to Jesus with a repentant heart.

Every day you still need to turn away from sin and turn towards him. But you are not praying, Jesus saved me again.

[23:58] You already have a share in him. Rather, you are simply confessing your sin. You are praying, Lord, forgive me, help me, change me, make me more like Jesus.

I don't want a dirty finger, I don't want a dirty toe, I don't want greed or lust or pride to take root in my life. Clean me, Lord, and help me live for you.

And indeed, my friends, that is the rhythm of the Christian life. I hope you get that. To be a Christian is to be someone who trusts in Jesus.

Or put another way, it is to be someone who depends on his cross every single day. We never move on from it. But we are not starting over and over again with Jesus.

We are already justified once and for all. We are not like disowned orphans, begging to become family again, but more like children saying sorry to their father whom they love and who loves them.

[25:15] So if today, you are someone who trusts in Jesus and you know you have dirty feet, come to him.

Come to Jesus, not as a stranger trying to get back in, but as a child coming home. The door is already open.

It was open at the cross and it stays open. So come as you are, confess, repent, and be refreshed by the gospel that says you are forgiven, you are loved, you are his child.

But here's the thing, not everyone wants to walk through that door. Which brings me to our second movement for today, love denied.

Look again at verses 10 and 11. Jesus says, and you are clean, though not every one of you, for he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

[26:28] Now that is unsettling. You see, what is Jesus getting at? Jesus is saying, do you know it's possible to spend years and years listening to the words of Jesus, to look exactly like every other Christian, to even hold an important position in church, and never ever truly give your heart to him?

That's the warning of this passage. Because it is possible to harden our hearts to Jesus' love. You see, here's the striking thing.

In verses 18 and 21, when Jesus said someone will betray him, the disciples didn't all point at Judas and say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, we figured that it was that guy.

No. Instead, verses 22 to 24, they were all at a loss, wondering who it was. For Judas was so good at looking clean that he fooled everyone except the one who actually is clean.

Indeed, later on in verses 27 to 29, when Jesus tells Judas to go and do quickly what he has intended, the disciples still misunderstand, thinking that Jesus is commanding Judas either to gather some provisions for the feast or to give some money to the poor.

[28:08] You see, a hardened heart can be hidden away, can't it? Perhaps think of it this way.

Imagine a stone that's been sitting in the middle of the Rejang River for 20 years. For two decades, water rushes over it, smoothing it, tumbling it, wearing down the edges.

From the outside, it looks soaked, part of the river. But crack it open, and the center is bone dry.

That was Judas. For three years, the living water poured over him. He heard the sermon of the mount firsthand. He saw Lazarus walk from the grave.

He even had his feet washed by the hands that made the stars. outwardly, he looked like a disciple, but inwardly, his heart was an island.

[29:14] He was in the presence of love, but he was wearing a spiritual raincoat. And when we keep ignoring the words and works of Jesus, and the love he displays, our hearts can grow desensitized and numb to him until we feel nothing at all.

So take heed. Are you in the same position as Judas today? You've been given lots of opportunities and privileges.

You've heard so much good Bible teaching. You've been in the company of godly Christians. You do know the gospel in your head. You've seen the love of Jesus on display for you. But are you in danger of denying that love? You see, it's quite possible there are one or two of you in this hall today who have always kept Jesus at arm's length. You've been interested enough to stay in the room, but never willing to let him actually wash you. Well, if that's you today, here it is.

[30:31] The door is still open. The same love that washed the disciples' feet is being extended to you right now. But don't presume on it.

Judas had three years and he wasted them. The time to respond is now. Because here is what's sobering about Judas.

He didn't stumble into betrayal accidentally. We see that in verse 2, the devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus.

And then verse 27, as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. And that wasn't a moment of weakness. It was the culmination of a long pattern of quietly saying no.

No to the teaching, no to the miracles, no to the love, until eventually his heart was fully given over to something else entirely.

[31:40] So if the Lord is speaking to you at this very point now, don't ignore him. Otherwise, you might discover you are actually in the devil's clutches.

And yet, even as his love is being denied, Jesus is still in complete control. Again and again, did you notice how the passage as a whole stresses Jesus has always known about his impending betrayal?

I mean, just look at verses 11 and 18 and 21. But more than that, he doesn't just know, he deliberately make sure it happens.

So for example, in verse 27, it is Jesus who directs Judas to do what he has to do, putting into motion the events that will lead directly to the cross.

Or here's the other thing I noticed in my study this week. In verse 2, the word translated betray is actually literally the word handed over.

[32:51] And throughout John, this same verb is used repeatedly to describe how Jesus is passed from one group to another until the crucifixion.

So Judas hands Jesus over to the Jewish leaders, then the Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, and Pilate hands him over to be crucified.

Same verb each time. And in every case, the handing over moves Jesus one step closer towards the crucifixion.

It is deliberate human action, yes, and yet at the same time, John is clearly showing us that this is also the unfolding of God's sovereign purposes.

As Jesus said earlier in John chapter 10, I have authority to lay down my very life. So Jesus isn't a victim of Judas' scheming.

[33:57] If anything, he is the conductor because he knows what has to be done to wash us. That's how much he loves us.

love So the shadow of the cross looms large over this room. But Jesus wants to do more than just wash his disciples.

He wants to transform them. So he gives them a command, love one another. Which brings us briefly to our third and final movement, love exemplified.

You see, Jesus has just shown them what love looks like. He got down on his knees and washed their feet. He served the one who would betray him.

He laid aside everything, his dignity, his comfort, his very life for the sake of others. And now he says, you do the same.

[35:04] Verses 14 and 15, now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

This is not a new religious ritual. Jesus isn't instituting a foot washing ceremony to be repeated in church services. Rather, he is saying, what I have just demonstrated should be the defining mark of everyone who follows me.

Because, verse 16, no servant is greater than his master. Now, let us slow down and think about what Jesus is really telling us.

he is saying, do you know what is the most God-like thing you can do in your life?

It's not turning stones into bread. It's not making people lots of money. It's humble service.

[36:18] my brothers and sisters, when you go beyond the call of duty to do all that photocopying and cutting for the kids' lesson at Sunday school the day before, do you know you are being like the God who loves you?

When you take the time to go and visit that person in the hospital with a broken leg and bring them meals and company, or even bring your sick pastor some vitamins, as someone did this week, do you know you are being like the God who loves you?

When you come early or stay back to set up or start the chairs for an evangelistic event where people will get to hear the gospel, do you know you are being like the God who loves you?

And more than that, verse 17, you will be blessed. Here's why. Real love, the kind Jesus has just demonstrated, doesn't say, pay me back.

Rather, it says, pay it forward. Pass it on. You have been served, now go and serve. You have been loved to the very end, now love others the same way.

[37:49] For as the evangelist Glenn Scrivener puts it, that is the happy life. That is the meaningful life. Not keeping yourself to yourself, nursing your uncleanness, shrinking your world smaller and smaller, but receiving the love of Jesus, letting him get his hands dirty for you, letting him cleanse you, and then turning around and passing that love on.

When you do that, you are blessed. So why would you settle for anything less?

So my friends, let's remember who we serve. The one who loved his own to the very end.

Come to his cross daily, confessing quickly, repenting honestly, trusting his finished work. Don't let your heart harden like Judas, receive his love instead, and pass it on.

For the love that took him to the cross has not run out, it flows through his people still. Because he loved to the end, we can love until he comes again.

[39:13] And because his love never ends, neither should ours. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I just pray now that we will let your word sing in again.

As we watch this scene of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, help us to appreciate once again what he has done for us on the cross. Perhaps some of us today have never personally known death cleansing for ourselves.

And Lord, if there is anyone in the hall like that today, I pray, Lord, that you would speak to them and open their ears and open their hearts. And I pray, Lord, that again as we ponder this passage, you will help us to consider how we can be most God-like, most Christ-like, Lord, in the way we love others and in the way we serve others in the coming weeks.

Please help us to be able to show that love to those around us. I pray all that in the name of Jesus. Amen.