

John 13 v 4 - 12

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 March 2014

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 01] I'd like you to turn back to where we read last week, which was the Gospel of John in chapter 13. As I said last week, what I hope that we will do over these coming weeks leading up to Easter is to consider the cross and particularly consider those words of Jesus which we thought about last week, which are here in John 13 verse 1, the second part of verse 1, having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

And what I said we wanted to do was to explore just those events and words of Jesus leading up to the cross to help us understand it more, to understand really that this was all a demonstration of the love of Christ, a revelation of Christ.

So we're going to read on from there and we're going to read from verse 4, verse 4. It breaks in, I know, into the middle of a sentence, but we'll read from verse 4.

So he, that's Jesus, 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.

It came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet.

[1 : 31] Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. 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. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that's why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

Do you understand what I've done for you? He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your teacher and Lord, 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. To leave the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them. I know there's, I'm sure, a lot of people here who are mourning the departure of Downton Abbey, waiting and longing for it to start again.

[2 : 35] And of course, Downton Abbey is just one of those series of dramas that have been portraying the lives of the, the, the, the, the, either end of the class divide, like Upstairs, Downstairs.

Those of you who are old enough to remember that. And it gives us an idea, not only of how the, the, the upper class, the hierarchy live, but it particularly gives us a peek downstairs to see what it was like to be in service.

And there was a lady in Guernsey, who I was brought up, and she died several years ago, but she went into service. Maybe you knew people as well, maybe relatives, went into service when they were young girls or young boys.

And in these programs, we see and understand that one of the most striking things about being in service was that it wasn't just a job, but it was a whole way of living.

If you were, if you were a servant, whatever your position in the household, from the scullery maid to the, sort of the butler or whatever, you didn't just work nine to five and then have the weekends off.

[3 : 37] But you were there at the beck and call of your master and mistress day and night, seven days a week. And perhaps, if you were very fortunate, you'd get half a day off a week to do your

own sort of thing.

There's not many of us here who'd put up with that sort of a work or job situation. But when we think about the Lord Jesus Christ and him going to the cross, we remind ourselves of his own words concerning himself in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10.

He speaks of himself in this way, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

The attitude of Jesus to the whole of his life was that he was God's servant, that he'd come into this world to serve. And the servant of the Lord was a thought, a concept that was all through the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Isaiah, looking forward to Jesus' coming.

Here's what Isaiah 42 says. The Lord says, Here is my servant whom I am uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight. I'll put my spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

[4 : 50] He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break. A smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Later on in chapter 53, one of the most well-known passages.

But just before that, chapter 52, verse 13. See my servant, or behold my servant, will act wisely. He will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

Just as there were many who were appalled at him, his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man. His form marred beyond human likeness. So he will sprinkle many nations.

So Jesus recognized that he was the fulfillment of these prophecies. That he was coming to this world as the Lord's servant. And he recognized that the greatest act of service, the penultimate, the pinnacle of his service, was that he should give his life as a ransom for many.

The cross about which we are thinking and considering. Now the reason I read earlier in the service from Philippians chapter 2, verses 6 to 11 particularly, is because many Christians in the past have seen a clear connection between verses 6 to 11 in Philippians 2 and the washing of the disciples' feet in John 13.

[6 : 07] They've seen that those actions of Jesus mirror something of the actions of his life, his humility and his condescension in coming to serve those that he loves.

As I said, last week we considered the fact that Jesus was showing them, revealing to them the great extent of his love. The perfection of his love, the vastness of his love.

And that's what we want to consider again as we look through these actions of Jesus, as he washes the disciples' feet and as we see that they are a picture of something even greater. A picture, as it were, of the whole of his life.

A picture of the whole of his service in coming into this world for us, which culminates in his death on the cross. And so we're just going to go through a little bit at a time and see how these two passages relate to the Lord Jesus and what it means for us because ultimately this act of Jesus in washing his disciples' feet was to show them and reveal them his love for them and to show them, of course, what real love is.

If we want to know what true love is, we don't read Mills and Boone. If we want to know what real love is, we don't watch chick flicks. If we want to know what real love is, we look at Jesus. 1 Corinthians 13 is a wonderful telling of the very character and nature of Jesus.

[7 : 31] He is love, personified. He is real love, lasting love, full love. And so we see that there are aspects of love here that should be reflected in us as well.

As believers, as those who trust in Lord Jesus Christ, he's given us an example, as he said to the disciples, of love. And so we can look at his love for us and what he did with that love and we can ask ourselves, well, is my love like that in any way?

Is there a reflection of that love in my life, in my love for him, and in my love for those that are his? So let's go back here to John 13, verse 6.

What's the first thing that Jesus did as he began to reveal the full extent of his love for his disciples? We're told this, he got up from the meal. He got up from the meal. Along with the other disciples, Jesus was reclining at the table, about to start his meal.

We're told that the food had been served, verse 2, But obviously before they began to eat, Jesus gets up and he goes to wash the disciples' feet. Now it's quite hard for us to imagine what that scene was like because we're so used to looking at Da Vinci's The Last Supper, aren't we?

[8 : 41] It's the archetypal painting of what The Last Supper looked like, but it looked nothing like that in that sense. Because in Jesus' day, and even still today in some parts of the East, you

wouldn't sit at a chair at a table.

You would lean on your elbow, reclining at the table, with your head towards the table and your feet as far away from the table as possible. That could be a good thing for some of us, perhaps as well. But Jesus got up from that place, that place at table. What does it mean? It reminds us, of course, that Jesus got up from the Father's right hand, from that place of honour, that place which was his by right to come and enter into this world.

Jesus got up from that place of glory. He was and always will be the very Son of God. Fully God, totally God, completely God, through all of eternity past, from the very beginning of the beginning of the beginning, there was always the Son and the Father and the Spirit.

And that glory that belonged to Jesus was always his, but he got up from that place. He left that place. In John 17, as Jesus prays a little later on, he prays to the Father in this way, with these words.

[10:05] Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. Many of the hymns that we sing try to express something of this sense of Jesus getting up and giving up.

There's the hymn that says, I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me, how he left the realms of glory for the cross of Calvary. A more modern song says, Jesus is Lord, yet from his throne eternal, in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.

And that lovely hymn that goes, Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown when thou camest to earth for me. Philippians chapter 2 verse 6 tells us that Jesus Christ was in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.

Though fully God, completely God, truly God, totally God, in nature, in power and glory, he did not consider his position of honor in heaven something that he had to retain, that he had to keep hold of for his own advantage, but something he was willing to let go of for a time for our advantage.

For sinners, so that we might be his people. He relinquished that place of glory, that place of honor, that place of kingship.

[11:28] In 1936, Edward VIII abdicated and surrendered his place as king of England, so he could marry Mrs. Simpson. All for love, we might say.

But Jesus, out of love for you and I, for those of us who are sinners, gave up something infinitely more valuable than a kingship on earth.

He gave up his place in heaven for a time. And so we see what genuine love is like, isn't it?

Genuine love is something which is willing to lose and forsake pleasures, comforts, rights for the sake of those it loves.

What about my love in your life? If Jesus willingly gave up that which was rightfully his, have we given up? Are we willing to give up what we might say? Well, it's my right to have this relationship. It's my right to have this time. It's my right to have this comfort. Are we willing to give up those things that we want or that we enjoy?

[12:32] Are we willing to sacrifice out of love for him and love for others? So the first thing we see, Jesus got up from the table. What else do we read?

Well, something else happened, don't we? He took off his outer clothing. Well, we might think of sort of like a toga. If you see those pictures and films and things of people in ancient times, a large piece of linen which hung over his shoulders down, tied around his waist and then down to his ankles.

All that was left that he wore at that moment was just his undergarment that covered his waist area, sort of a loincloth we might say in that sense, the usual attire of a servant or a slave.

That's all they would wear, just something in that nature. And so again, Philippians tells us that Jesus made himself nothing. He made himself nothing.

Literal meaning of John 13, verse 4, it says he took off his outer clothing. It says he laid aside his outer clothing. Laid aside.

[13:38] That reminds us, doesn't it, of the words of Jesus himself, where he speaks about his own life and death. The Father loves me because I lay aside my life or lay down my life.

Again, hymn writers have tried to express this. Haven't we sang this just a few moments ago at the beginning of our service? He left his Father's throne above, so free, so infinite his grace, emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race.

Made himself nothing. Emptied himself. And by that, we're not meant to think that somehow he emptied himself of his godness or his deity, that somehow he's less God when he came down into this world.

But rather, he laid aside the privileges of being God. He laid aside the honour and the worship of being God that were his for a time. You see, in heaven, the Lord Jesus endured no temptation. In heaven, there was no suffering. In heaven, he was not in the devil's hands. There was no hunger. There was no pain. There was no tiredness. There was no weakness. There was nothing there that could afflict him in any way.

[14:47] But when he came into this world, he emptied himself of those things, and he embraced those things that he'd never known before. 2 Corinthians 8, verse 9. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.

And what riches he had! The riches of all of heaven, of all the universe, of all the world were his. Jesus emptied himself, laid aside, made himself nothing.

Once again, dear friends, don't we see that love, that is true love, is a humble love. It's a love that's willing to be humbled and humble itself. It's not a pride, not a proud, not an arrogance, not a puffed up love.

That is concerned about itself firstly. That's the love of Christ, humbling himself, emptying himself, willing to lose.

What about you and I? What's our love like? Is our love a proud love? Are we proud of our love? Do we do things and actions?

[15:52] Are they born of wanting to look good to people? Wanting to appear to be something that we're not? Wanting to be acceptable? Are we willing to be humbled? Are we actually more concerned about loving than about our appearance?

About what people think of us? About what they say to us? Or say of us? When we love Christ, those things need to take a long way down the list.

Love. Are we willing to do that when we love one another? Be humbled. What will people say of me if I go and clean the toilets? What will people say of me if I go and act in this way?

Or visit this person? Or speak to them in the street? They'll see me speaking to the person who sells the homeless newspaper.

The big issue. What will they think of me? Or the tramp or the down and out? Love isn't concerned with pride. And then we see here, don't we, that Jesus not only laid aside his outer garments, but more than that, we're told, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

[16:58] He took something to himself. That would have been like a large apron. In fact, it's what was used by him later to dry the disciples' feet. He took something to him.

The wearer of a servant. He took something to himself. So Jesus didn't just lay aside what was his and rightfully his.

He didn't just humble himself and empty himself. He took something to himself. Again, Philippians says, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man.

He took to himself our human nature. He took to himself our humanity. He became truly, truly human. This is what happened at what theologians call the incarnation, or what we call Christmas. It's what we celebrate at Christmas, that God became man. That in this incredible mystery, as John puts it in John chapter 1, the word became flesh, the eternal son of God, the true and living God became a human being.

[18:06] And again, we're dealing in the realms of the greatest mystery in the universe, greatest minds of trying to understand and work out what this meant. But we can't.

And we've got to be very careful we don't try to explain the inexplicable. We've got to be careful we don't try to bring God and the miracle of the incarnation into our feeble understanding.

There's nothing like this in the universe. There's nothing to be compared with what Jesus did. How can someone who is God be united with humanity and be 100% God and 100% human?

Well, that's immediately a maths problem. But it's not a problem to God. 100% man. 100% God.

Again, we sang just a few minutes ago one of Wesley's hymns.

Who can explore his strange design? In vain the firstborn seraph, angel, tries to sound, to understand the depths of love divine.

[19 : 05] 'Tis mercy all. Let earth adore. Let angel minds inquire no more. When Jesus stepped into this world, he didn't just come in his divine nature.

He did not simply just come as God. But he came in humanity because if he wasn't human, he couldn't fulfill this work of service that was so essential for us and our salvation.

He had to come humbly. He had to come humanly in all its frailty, in all its weakness. Again, this is great encouragement to us.

When we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, we thought of this several weeks ago, we think of the Lord Jesus Christ, we think of the fact and realize the fact that he walked where we walk. He lived as we lived.

He struggled with the struggles we struggle with. He knows the pains that we've experienced. He didn't just come as some great God, creature, sort of ghost or spirit into this world, but he took on real hands and real feet and real flesh and real blood.

[20 : 08] In every way, he had to be made like us, as Hebrew says. He says, Since the children of flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity. Why? So that by his death, he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil.

For this reason, he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God. That he might make atonement for the sins of his people.

And because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he's able to help those who are being tempted. But there was one thing about Jesus that was different to us. One thing that had to be different to us.

As again in Hebrews 4, we realize we do not have a high priest, Jesus, who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. We have one who's been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.

That's the only thing different. That he was without sin. And that was imperative, because he had to go as that sinless, spotless sacrifice to the cross.

[21 : 14] But he had to die. He had to really die. Physically die. Otherwise, it would be impossible for our sins to be forgiven. He had to taste the full experience of death for us.

Not just physical death, but spiritual death. And that death, which is the punishment of our sins, laid upon him. And so we see again, that the love that is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, is a love that is willing to adapt for the needs of others.

It's a love that is not static. It's not a love that puts down, if I can put it this way, limits and say, my love will only go to this length, and it will not go any further. I will not be moved from this place.

But love that is bending, love that is malleable, love that is willing to change and adapt for the sake of others. It's no good love that is just formal and straight, if I can put it that way.

What about your love for the Lord Jesus and my love for the Lord Jesus? Is it such a love that says, yes, Lord, I want to change. I want to be different. I'm willing to give up and to be adaptable to the things that you have for me to do.

[22 : 24] I'm willing, Lord, to listen to your voice and to your word and to give up those sins and to become the person you want me to be. I'm willing to do things differently. I thought this was the best way, but love has taught me, and you've taught me this is a different way.

Is my love like that for others as well, as his love is to me? And then we come to the great climax, don't we, of Jesus' washing the disciples' feet.

He got up from his place, he laid aside his outer garments, he wrapped the towel around his waist, and then verse 5, after that he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet.

There's really only one thing that we can think of when we think of Jesus pouring out, and that was the great goal of his life, the great purpose which he came, which was that he might pour out his blood upon the cross for our salvation.

That's what Jesus spoke of when he was at the Last Supper. Just in Mark's Gospel, Mark points to this, and the words of Jesus. Jesus, we're told, took up the cup, gave thanks for it, and offered it to them, and he said, this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, or else we're poured out for you.

[23 : 46] Paul again remarks here in Philippians in chapter 2. After Jesus had been found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Jesus' obedience was that willing submission to death. It wasn't that death took his life from him. It wasn't that death had power over him. Death had no power over him.

You see, the only power that death has is because of sin. The reason that death will take us and that we cannot resist death or overcome death is because we have sinned, and we are sinners, and sin is intrinsic in our nature, and therefore in our nature we must die because sin is there.

But Jesus had no sin, as we saw, and so death could not take him. No matter how long he lay on that cross, no matter how long he bled, he would not die until he willingly, obediently, gave himself up to death of his own free will.

That's the whole point. Lay down my life. That's why when we read through the account of that crucifixion, we find that Jesus speaking, saying, it is finished, and he gave his spirit to the Father.

[24 : 59] Father, receive my spirit. He gave his life to the Father. He had the power to take, as it were, that soul, that spirit, which is in each one of us, and take it from the body so that life left the body.

Okay. He humbled himself. He became obedient to death. Not in the sense that death told him what to do, but he was obedient to the Father until death.

And the Father's plan and his plan and the Spirit's plan from before the world was this, that the Son of God should come into this world and that he should die upon a cross for sinful men and women like us to save us from hell and save us from our sins.

And so in obedience, Jesus died. And so again, the hymn writer, Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

And here we say, tis mystery all. The immortal dies. What does immortal mean? It means you cannot die. You live forever. But here, the immortal, the one who could not be touched by death dies.

[26 : 03] And why does he die? Why does he pour out his blood? He pours it out to cleanse us. From our sins. Just as he began to wash the disciples' feet. There's a picture, isn't there?

Just as there's a picture in baptism of washing, cleansing from sin. And indeed, Jesus makes it very clear that the picture of his washing their feet is a picture of cleansing, spiritual cleansing.

For when Peter says, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well, he says, a person who's had a bath needs only wash his feet. His whole body is clean.

You are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him and that's why he said not everyone was clean. He's talking about spiritual cleansing. He's not talking just about their feet. It was a picture being baptized, being washed, being cleansed.

Indeed, it is Christ's death and his blood that alone cleanses us from sin. Hebrews 9, verse 14. Here's the writer.

[27 : 07] How much more then will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished, sinless to God, cleanse our consciences from acts to lead to death so that we may serve the living God.

Poured out to wash and cleanse. And so again, we see what real love is like. Real love is costly, isn't it? It's willing to suffer.

It's willing to give and not count the cost, but to give freely. That's what Jesus did. He didn't count the cost. He didn't look at you and I and he said, well, I don't know.

There's all these people and they've sinned and they've broken God's commandment and they deserve his punishment and they deserve to be in hell and the only way I can rescue them is for me to come and to die in their place.

Well, that's a lot, you know. I don't know whether I want to pay that much for them. I don't mind, you know, just maybe a little bit of a wound or a little bit of a beating up but I don't know if I'm willing to pay.

[28 : 09] He didn't do that. He didn't count the cost. But knowing that you and I would be eternally and forever lost and damned, said, I will pay the price and I'll pay it willingly and I'll pay it gladly for the joy set before him endured the cross despising the shame.

How on earth can your love and mine compare to that? But it needs to. C.T. Studd was the founder of the World Evangelization Crusade.

He was a bit balmy and if you ever read about his life he was really, you know, an oddity but he was a wonderful man who loved God.

He was a world-class cricketer and played for England and he was a very, very rich man. He gave up all his wealth, he gave up his career and he went on the mission field to tell people of Jesus and he had a little plaque and he put it on his desk and he read it every morning and it said this, If Jesus Christ be God and died for me then no sacrifice I can make can be enough for him.

No sacrifice I can make can be enough for him. Jesus Christ be God. Jesus Christ be God and died for you and he's asking you to sacrifice and he's asking you to give up and he's asking you to love him and to love others.

[29 : 26] And it's costly. Didn't he say anyone who wants to follow me must take up his cross and follow me? Are you following him? It may be costly for you at uni, it may be costly for you at work, it may be costly for you and your family, it may be really tough at the moment to follow him and it may be that there's the temptation to say well, you know, it'd be easier if I just went with the flow, if I just went with everybody else, if I just gave up following Jesus, gave up holding to his word and said yes, I'll go and get blotto at the weekend like my friends do and I'll go and I'll act in the same way that they do and I'll go and I won't bother coming to church.

Dear friends, it's costly to live for Christ in this world today but that's what love calls for. The love of Christ calls for it. How can we withhold that love?

One last thing as we close this morning and it's the last thing that we read here about Jesus. Once he had washed their feet, what do we read? When he had finished, we're told, verse 12, washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

Philippians 2, verse 9 says, Therefore God exalted him to the highest place, gave him the name that is every name, above every name. In other words, here's the truth. Once Jesus had finished the work, once he'd done this act of service in washing their feet, once he'd done this act of service in dying in our place to pour out his blood for us, then he rose again and he ascended to the Father's right hand.

Hebrews 1, verse 3, speaking of Jesus, after he had provided cleansing, purification for sins, he sat down at the right under the majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name that he has inherited is superior to theirs.

[31 : 16] Jesus rose again, returned to that place of glory that was his before he'd entered into the world for us. He'd performed that act of service. He'd humbled himself. He'd taken our humanity.

He'd finished the work upon the cross. And so his resurrection and ascension were evidence, were proof that he'd done it. He'd completed it. It was perfect. He'd been successful.

Like an action hero, James Bond or somebody else who goes into the enemy lines, goes into the enemy place and carries out a mission. He doesn't return back to home again until he's fulfilled the mission, until he's blown up the nuclear bombs or whatever it may be.

He makes good his exit knowing his work is done. So Jesus knew his work was done, knew it had been finished and completed all that was necessary for your forgiveness, all that was necessary for you to be right with God, all that was necessary for you to be saved from hell and brought into life in heaven.

All was completed there and then in those words, it is finished. And so having finished, he returns to the Father, to that place of his glory, returns to the right hand, a place of honor, but more than that, a place of authority and of power from which he now rules and reigns, administering, as it were, the work that he's done, applying the wonderful forgiveness and cleansing that he purchased and bought for us at the cross.

[32 : 40] And you know, that has significance for us as well. Because that final act of Jesus points to something concerning us. It's a promise to us that we too who love Christ and serve Christ do not do so in vain.

It's not just pointless being a Christian and serving Jesus and loving others and loving him. There is something that we can look forward to just as Jesus looked forward. We look forward to that time when we shall be rewarded.

Paul looked forward to that. He says this in Philippians 3 a bit later on, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

That's the wonderful thing. The wonderful goal is yes, there is a prize and a treasure and a delight and a reward for us in heaven. Not because of anything we've done but because of who Jesus is and what he's done for us.

But this hard life that we live at times, though it has many joys and many delights in living for Christ, it's the best life there is. And if you've never trusted Christ and if you aren't walking with him, let me

assure you that whatever you're doing, it's second and third rate.

[33 : 55] Because only following Christ and loving him and living for him is what makes life worth living. But it's not just for now.

It's for eternity. It's forever. And so, dear friends, here's love. Real love. True love. Christ-like love. Love that he had for you and has for you and for me.

Love that humbles and serves and it's love that he longs for as he said to the disciples to see reflected in us. The teacher, the servant's not greater than the master.

If I've done this, you do this. If I've washed feet, if I've shown love, you show love. And if we don't have that love, if we don't have that love, if we look at our hearts, we say, Lord, Lord, I recognize my heart is so selfish and it's so consumed with me and it's so bothered about what I do and what I get, then turn to him, look to him, ask him, Lord, pour out into my heart a new love, a fresh love, a love like yours, Lord.

Take this stony and selfish heart and change it, oh Lord, because I want to be like you. God will hear that prayer and Christ will answer that prayer.

[35 : 16] It's the prayer he wants us to pray and he'll give us that love. Well, let's sing together then, dear friends, as we come to a close in our time this morning.

We're singing together number 821, really speaking about all that we have been thinking of and there's a last verse there, last verse, so let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone him each other's knees to refer for it's Christ we're serving.

Let's sing 821.