

# The Order of the Towel: Servant Leaders

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[0:00] How you guys doing? That's good. Well, there's more acoustics in here. It sounds like you said good, right? Usually in Cyberport, it's all muffled. I can't hear anything. I'm like, oh, what's going on here?

Yeah. Hey, so we are, you know, we didn't have a place to meet maybe a week ago, and God just kind of opened up this place for us, and we've known him for a long time, and so we're very thankful.

Some of the staff are in here, and you might see some of the students walking around here. This is a home for visually impaired, and there's probably about 50 or 60 kids that live here full time, and so I think we're praying that always how we as a church can reach out to the people here in this community, because it's part of our community, and what God might have us do as a church is to love the people here and to help them in this process.

So my name is Tobin Miller, and I'm one of the pastors here. This is your first time, or it's your 50th time, and you didn't get in trouble, really.

Okay. It was a Sunday, and I had this kind of weird burning sensation over my chest.

[1:08] I almost felt like I had indigestion. I never had indigestion before, but I had this feeling like indigestion. And it was an important Sunday, a Saturday. It was an important Saturday because we were going to take our kids to one of their first movies they've ever seen.

So we promised them a movie, and we promised them to eat hamburgers afterwards. And all along in this process, I just felt very uncomfortable, like right in here. I felt like somebody's kind of poured acid right on my chest, and I felt that as I was going along.

And we went to the movie, and we ate hamburgers, and we came home and wrestled. And so this is a picture from that night. So we were wrestling, and you can see how young the kids are. It was about 10 years ago.

And I still didn't feel good. But I just felt like this. I said, you know, Sunday's going to be really important because I'm a pastor, and I have to be there for Sunday. And this Sunday was going to be really important because we were going to go to two services.

And so I needed to be there to do these two services. And I figured, well, after the two services, I would check myself into the hospital and see what was going on, right? So that's not, if you ever have that sensation, don't say those things because that's dumb talk.

[2:12] That's like chapter three of my book, Dumb Things I've Done in My Life. And so I just kind of gutted it out. I gutted the pain out. But what I didn't know was this, that God had allowed this little piece of plaque to lodge in the artery of my heart.

And over the night, that piece of plaque got infected, and it got inflamed, and it exploded into my artery. And so instead of my artery looking like this, my artery looked like this.

Nothing. And so what I didn't realize in that process about 1.30 in the morning on a Sunday morning, really early, that my heart had started to die. I was having a heart attack.

I didn't know it. I woke up, and I was in an incredible amount of pain. And my heart was dying. Well, you know that I survived it because I'm here, and this is a testimony to what God did in my life.

But you know what? I have this scar on my heart now. I have this hard piece of flesh. I have this hard piece that now forever reminds me of that heart attack that I had.

[ 3 : 23 ] And to be honest, guys, you know, there's not a time in my life right now. There's not an event that happens. There's not a day that goes by where that experience doesn't shape me somehow.

It shapes how I speak. It shapes how I think. It shapes how I spend my time. It shapes some of my personality.

My personality has changed since that time. It actually shapes how I spend my money. And it shapes how I think about my future.

God used that event. Instead of just speaking to me, he allowed me to experience this event, and it changed me forever. It changed me forever.

What I want to do today is I want to look at the last in our sermon series. We're going to talk about servant leadership. Some of you are going to hear, and you're going to say, well, I'm not this person.

[ 4 : 24 ] I'm not a leader. I'm not a servant. But the Bible says that we all, as God's people, are leaders. That we're all called to serve. We're all called to honor the Lord in everything that we do.

And I want us to listen to this passage today, because this passage isn't just about leading, but it's about heart problems. And the Bible says that you and I, everyone in here, has a problem with our heart.

That there's this hardness in our heart. There's this sickness in our heart. And the Bible warns us that if we don't deal with it, that if we don't recognize it and start making steps to fix it and to change it, if we don't do these things, that the potential for damage is massive.

And the potential for damage isn't just a dead person, but it's a dead eternity. The potential for damage isn't just a dead heart, but it's a dead church.

The potential for damage isn't just a dead pastor, but it's a dead reputation for Jesus in the community of Hong Kong. So I want to look at this passage.

[ 5 : 42 ] And you've got to realize that all the people in Scripture, everybody in here had heart problems. And Jesus is going to deal with the heart problems of his disciples in this passage. I mean, this passage is going to look at, it's going to compare two people's hearts.

It's going to compare the disciples' hearts to Jesus' hearts. And it's going to talk about how we can change, how we can fix that problem. What can we do to make our hearts better? And then after this, we're going to take communion together, because I think this is the perfect example, because this is kind of what was happening in this passage.

Now, you've got to remember that in John 13, it is the final night of Jesus' life. Okay, so this is the final night of Jesus' life. For three years, he's been ministering, and now he's in Jerusalem, and he's come to sacrifice himself for us.

Now, you don't see it in this gospel, but what you learn in the other gospels is that this event that we're going to say today is called the Last Supper. And so Jesus brings all his disciples together, they're going to have one last meal, and then within 12 hours, he's going to be hanging on the cross.

Now, what we don't see in this passage, but what we learn in other scriptures and other gospels is this, that right before this happens, all the disciples are arguing. All the disciples are arguing over this time, because they believe that soon Jesus is going to come, he's going to wipe out all the enemies, he's going to put up a kingdom, he's going to put up a throne, he's going to rule, and they want to rule with him.

[ 7 : 04 ] And so the other gospels tell us that before this meal, before this sacred time, they're arguing over who's going to be the greatest. They're not really arguing over who's going to be the greatest or who's going to be the best, because Jesus is the best and Jesus is the greatest, but what they're arguing over is who's going to be the second greatest and who's going to be the second best.

And so you need to picture that as we come to the scripture, because this sets the theme in the stage for John 13. Now it's a Passover meal, when you came into a house in a Jewish culture, especially during Passover, two things would always be there.

There would be a basin full of water and there would be a slave. And when you walked into the house, the slave in this culture, his job was to kneel down, take your sandals off, clean your feet, and make you ready for the dinner table.

Now in this culture, when you're wearing sandals and dirty feet and people just throw trash out on the road, the feet were like the worst part of your body. It was just disgusting.

And so you always washed your feet when you came into the house, because if you didn't wash your feet, it would be terrible and it would smell bad and you'd have just refuge everywhere. In this passage today, what we see is that there's a basin there, verse 5, but there's no servant.

[ 8 : 19 ] There's no slave to do that. And so when the disciples come in, they're just mad at each other, right? They're disgusted with each other because they've been arguing and fighting over who's the greatest and who's better than them and who's going to serve and do all these things.

And so they're just so mad and they're just so angry that they don't even think about washing their feet because no one else there is to wash their feet. So they don't wash their feet. No one washes their feet. And they're probably in a hurry because they want to get to the table where Jesus is sitting because where the table Jesus is sitting, you kind of recline on your elbow like this and it's kind of like a U shape and Jesus would be at the head and they want to be next to Jesus because they want to have power.

They want to have authority. They want to be known by everybody as, wow, you guys are really good. And so they walk in. They're angry. They're frustrated with each other. They're disgusted at Peter. They're disgusted at James and John and Bartholomew and Thaddeus and all these guys because they're just so self-centered.

They just think about themselves. They're not thinking about anybody else. And they walk through and they just have junk all over their feet and they're walking over this clean place which is clean for the Sabbath. And so they're kind of defiling that. And they sit down by Jesus and they just sit there.

So they come in and they're just angry. They're self-absorbed. They're frustrated. And they stink. It sounds like my life a lot, doesn't it?

[ 9 : 28 ] When things don't go my way, when I was hoping that something would happen the way I wanted it in my idealistic world because Christina's always telling me I'm idealistic. And I am idealistic. And when those things don't happen just that way, I just get frustrated.

Sometimes I get angry. Sometimes I stink. That's what happens in this passage. And it says that Jesus is watching them.

You wonder what Jesus is thinking. I mean, he knows, okay, 12 hours I'm dead. Three years I've been training these guys to take over.

And they're arguing over power and authority and popularity. You look at your Bible passage.

It says in verse 1 that Jesus knows everything. He knows what's going to happen. He knows that his hour has come. He knows that he's going home. But it also says he loves these people.

[10:34] He loves his disciples. So he came into this world system. And the word in Greek there means a world that does not know God. A world that's opposed to God. A world that's anti-God.

And he came into this world that's in rebellion to God. And he just started loving these people. Verse 1 says that he loves them to the end. It's an amazing word in Greek.

It actually means like three or four things. It means he loved them to the end of their life. It means it loved them to the end of his capacity. It means he loved them to the end of eternity. It means that he loved them perfectly.

So Jesus is looking at these guys and he loves them. And he loves them perfectly. And the word actually says he actually shows his love.

And he's shown his love to them already. And they're arguing. In verse 4 it says that Jesus knowing everything he gets up.

[11:30] And he knows everything again. Remember think about this guys. He knows everything. He knows who he is. He knows his authority. He knows his power. He knows his position. He knows what's going to happen to him.

He knows the hearts of his disciples. He knows their pride. He knows their arrogance. He knows their stinkiness. He knows their self-centeredness. He knows that they're self-seeking. He knows that they're going to betray him.

He knows that they're going to deny him. He knows that they're going to fail him in just a few hours. He knows everything. And he gets up.

And he does something that is incredibly counter. Anti-cultural. He does something that's never before done in Jewish history. It's never written about in any history books.

He does something that a best friend would never have to do to another best friend. He does something that a Jewish slave by law would never have to do to its Jewish master. Jesus, God, the master, the rabbi.

[12:25] He lays aside all of the symbols of his authority. He becomes a slave. He becomes a servant. We don't see it in the text, but the words bring it out.

There's just total silence. I mean, they are dumbfounded. They don't know how to react. They're watching this.

They're just watching him go from stinky pair of feet to stinky pair of feet to stinky pair of feet because he loves them. He wants to serve them. He's giving all these things. And remember, these guys, they're hardened fishermen.

I mean, they're prideful. They're proud. They're self-serving. I mean, they have heart problems.

They're people with hard hearts. Have you ever tried to serve a person with a hard heart? It's really hard. Because no matter how kind you are, it just doesn't get there.

[13:27] And so Peter is watching them, and in verse 6 and 8, Peter is watching all these things. And when he gets to Peter, Peter says this. He says, never. Never.

Not in the past. Not now. Not in the future. I mean, it's just so, the language is prideful. The language is self-centered. And he's basically saying, I know better than you, God.

I know how to run my life. And there's no way, ever. These other guys, they need the cleaning, but I don't need the cleaning. My life is pretty good compared to James and John.

Never. I'm never going to let you clean me. Heart problems. Jesus looks at him in verse 7.

He says, Peter, you don't know what I'm about to do. I know what I'm about to do. But hopefully, one day, you will know it. Then in verse 10, he begins to talk about bathing and cleaning.

[ 14 : 26 ] And he says there's two types of bathing. Now, Peter, as he's listening to this, he's thinking physically. Physically baths, physical things. But what Jesus is talking about is a spiritual level. And Jesus says there's one part that when you come in, you're totally cleaned.

You're totally immersed. You are sanctified. You're redeemed. You're washed. Past, present, and future. It's salvation. And there's another type of cleaning where you just come in.

And because you've been walking around in the world. And because you're struggling with sin. And because you're making mistakes. And because you're not perfect. You just make mistakes. And you have sin. And this part of cleaning is coming in. And you're asking forgiveness for the sin for the day.

Why 1 John 1.9 says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He's not talking about eternity. He's talking about our everyday walk.

And these guys are walking around. And their feet are really dirty. And Jesus wants to teach them a lesson. Verse 12, we're told that Jesus gets up.

[ 15 : 30 ] And he puts all his clothes back on. So he becomes a teacher again. And as any good teacher, he has them one question. Do you understand what I've done to you? And then he goes on to explain the difference between his kingdom and our kingdom.

He goes on to explain the difference between people with heart problems. And people who have new hearts. And he says in the world's kingdom that position and power and authority are everything.

And when you get them, you expect people to allow you to use them. And people bow down to you. But Jesus says, that's not how it is in my kingdom. Christ says for us as Christians, for all of us, that with power and with position and with authority comes more opportunities to serve.

And the world looks at our life like this triangle. And we're at the top. And the higher we get up in our position and in our work and whatever you do today.

Whatever bank, whatever investment school, whatever school, whatever you're studying, whatever hospital, whatever you're doing. The world's going to tell you that the higher you get up, the more people below are going to serve you. And that you should expect that because you've earned it.

[ 16 : 54 ] It's an honor. But what Christ is trying to tell Tobin and Watermark and the church is that his leadership is like this.

And the more we get down to the pinnacle, the more people we have to serve above us. The more people God has allowed us to serve. So leadership and authority is not about having people serve you.

People with heart problems think that. But God's people, Christians, whether you're a leader or whether you're not perceived as a leader, whoever you are, the authority is like this.

And our call is to serve the people beneath us. Does that make sense? I mean, it's taken me a long time to think through that. I mean, I still confess that I don't totally understand that.

And there's times in my life when I come home and I want to live like this. And I expect my wife and my kids to serve me and do things for me. And when I come into the office, even a church office, there's times when I'm busy and things are in a hurry.

[ 18 : 08 ] I expect this. But Christ says, is this. And that the higher up we get, if we see things from a heavenly viewpoint, if we see things as he sees things, we're to become slaves.

We become servants. Again, the world, HSBC, Credit Suisse, HKU, wherever you are, even some churches are going to say, power and authority is a chance to be served.

What Jesus is trying to tell his disciples is that being a leader is a place of service. And that Christians, all Christians, every one of us in here, we're called to serve other people.

That's what this passage is all about. We're called to care for people and serve them who can't care for themselves anymore. Blind people. Sick people.

Elderly family. Widows. Orphans. People in prison. And we're called to serve people who can help themselves.

[ 19 : 21 ] We're called to serve our bosses. We're called to serve our friends. We're called to serve our spouses. We're called to serve our enemies. We're called to serve everyone. And Jesus is basically saying that, you know, service is what we have been called to do.

And he says in his passage, think about it. If he is God, he's the creator of all things. It's that word if. It keeps hitting me right in the forehead. If he is God and if he's the creator of all things and he has come to wash our souls and to wash our feet and to serve us.

Surely, us as his people can serve people around us also. In verse 17, he ends.

And he says this and it's, you go, yeah, for sure. But he says it and it's important. He says there's a big difference between knowing and doing. There's a big difference between knowing the truth and living it out.

There's a big difference between knowing and serving. The Greek philosophers would say that's not true.

[ 20 : 31 ] The Greek philosophers said you can know something, but it doesn't have to affect your life. The Hebrew philosophers, the Jewish philosophers, God would say that's impossible.

Because knowing always predicates or causes an action. And it's impossible to know and not do. Does that make sense?

That's the sermon. It's what I've been struggling with for weeks and years. And 30 years.

And 40 years. As we go into communion, I want to ask you three questions. I want you to think about some things in this passage as we look at Christ and what he's done for us.

And the first thing is this. How's your heart? No, really, really. How? How's your heart right now?

[ 21 : 33 ] Because this is a powerful passage. We're going to come back to this again. This passage from the very beginning, what it does is it compares two hearts. It compares the disciples. It compares Jesus. And it shows these differences in these hearts.

One that is focused on self. And one that is focused on others. Is your heart self-confident today? Are you in control?

Are you selfish? Do you seek ambition? Do you want people to look at you and go, wow, you did a great, great job there.

That was totally awesome. Are you insensitive? Are you ungenerous? Are you prideful?

And the passage says to you and me, guys, the only way we can know our heart is we can compare it to Jesus' heart. Because if you're like me, the first thing I want to do is I want to compare it to other people around me.

[ 22 : 40 ] And if I compare my heart and my life to everybody else around me, I'm always going to turn out looking good. Always. But the passage says it's only when we compare ourselves to Christ's heart that we get a really good understanding of our heart.

I want to share something with you. I don't want you to tell anybody this. But I brought it here. This is my towel.

I love this towel. It even has my name on it. This is an awesome towel, guys. I love this towel. With this towel, I can wash myself.

I feel good. It makes me feel secure. It's an awesome. My wife wasn't going to let me buy this towel. And I basically bought it without her permission, right? So it tells you where my heart was.

This makes me feel good. It can even, somebody as big as me, I can wrap around it. And it's just, I feel so secure with this towel. I serve myself with this towel. This is my towel.

[ 23 : 49 ] This is how I serve myself. When I need something, when I think of something, when I want to use my money, when I want to use my time, when I want to use my talents, this is my towel. This is how I serve myself.

I have another towel. This is my towel, how I serve people. Kind of my little handy pocket towel.

When people's lives are a little messed up. When the milk has been spilled. When there's a little crisis. I take out my people towel. And I try to serve people.

Try to wash their feet. Try to help them as much as possible. But this is my towel. This is an awesome towel. It's where my money goes to.

It's where my time goes to. It's where my effort goes to. It's where my heart goes to. The passage says, what would happen if we switched towels?

[ 24 : 48 ] What if we started using our towel for other people? Our time.

Our energy. Our thoughts. What if instead of work, instead of using this towel at work, we used this towel. We served everybody around us and tried to help them and encourage them. Would that be a good thing?

What if at home, as a dad, when I come home, instead of grabbing my towel and my expectations and the things I want and the things I need because I've been working so hard and I need it and I deserve it and I want to watch TV.

And please don't bother me because I want to go to the toilet by myself without somebody coming in and saying, hey, what are you doing? I'm like, I'm on the toilet. Thank you. It's my towel. But what if when I came home, instead of grabbing this towel for myself, I grabbed this towel for myself.

And with this towel, I started serving my family and my kids. Would that be a good family? What about at work?

[ 26 : 01 ] You're going to go to work tomorrow. I get a day off kind of because today's my work day, but sometimes I get a work off day off. What if at work, instead of just coming in and going to your desk and grabbing this towel because this is you because you've earned it and this is your authority and this is how you do things and it makes you feel comfortable and you know how to do and it's predictable.

This towel isn't predictable. This towel is predictable. This towel is safe. It just feels so good. What if at work tomorrow you use this towel for yourself? And you start thinking, how can I serve people in my office?

How can I serve my boss? How can I serve the rough, angry, mean, hard-hearted, difficult, stinky people in my office?

Now don't tell them that they're one of those people, right? That will never work out well. But how can I serve those people? So as we come to the communion table, I want you to ask how your heart is.

Is your heart focused on yourself or is your heart focused on somebody else? I have a second question I've been asking myself and this I think is probably the most important question.

[ 27 : 18 ] And the question I want you to think about when you come to the communion table because it's the question here. And the question is this, do you understand how much Jesus loves you? And how much you do not deserve it?

And how much he is continually pursuing you and serving you every moment of every day? When you come to the communion table, that's something good to think about.

That's something good to understand because that's what the passage says. That Jesus pursues us. Jesus loves us fully, totally, perfectly. He's pursuing you. He's serving you. Do you know that the Bible says that there's never a time if you're God's child, that he's not pursuing us.

Does the fact that Jesus loves you uncontrollably, that he's serving you 100% all the time and you do not deserve it, does that change your life?

I mean like a heart attack change. It changes how you think. It changes how you speak. It changes how you serve.

[ 28 : 58 ] It changes how you use your money. It changes how you use your talents. Just thinking about how much God loves you and how much he pursues you and how much he serves you.

Does that change your day? Does it change your attitude at home?

At work? At work? the problem is our hearts are hard and Jesus knows that so he continually pursues he continually brings his word he continually pursues he continually brings his spirit he breaks us down he gives us heart attacks he gives us failures he gives us things the only way that we can survive them is we turn to him and realize that he's in control and that he loves you does that make any sense?

no one's nodding everybody's like I'm still learning that one last thing as you come to communion table today and you think about your heart and you think about how much God loves you and you think about how much you don't deserve it and you think about how much he's serving you every moment of every day there's not a second that he's not serving you because he didn't serve you for one second you would perish you would die that's what God's word says as you think about that does it change how you leave here after everything is over?

maybe I should ask how does it change? do you think about well how can I serve this person? how can I be a better steward?

[ 31 : 06 ] how can I change towels in my office? or how can I change towels at my home? or how can I change towels in my community group? or how can I change towels wherever God sends me?



maybe some of us in here are going well I agree I think it's great but how do I really serve? what should I do? how can I do it? what do you want me to do? okay because a lot of us are like doers just give me something to do I know I know but I don't know what to do this is what I've been trying to do wherever you go this week wherever God sends you I guarantee you he's going to put a place and something in your life that you can serve because the scripture's all for that people are walking down the road there's a broken person in the road everybody else passes him but this one Samaritan he stops and picks him up God puts opportunities to serve his people and other people in our life everywhere the question is are we going to stop?

are we going to remember our heart? are we going to remember God's grace? are we going to remember that he loves us out of control? are we going to remember that he's always serving us?

if that is true then we are to serve other people also so this is what I've challenged myself to do the last couple weeks wherever God sends you wherever you go this week look for the thing that needs to be done and everybody else knows it but no one else wants to do it look for the thing that needs to be done and everyone else knows it but no one else wants to do it like stinky feet whatever that is take a step of faith and trust the Lord I came home one day and our house was just a mess there was dishes everywhere and it was just it was disgusting and so I had to say okay so I got to make a choice am I just going to not do anything I'll walk by this or am I going to serve in our house dishes is that big thing that no one wants to do everybody sees it's there but no one wants to do it in your office it might be answering the phone or it might be

I don't know what it is in your office but in our house it says dishes and so I went in there and I said okay I'm going to do the dishes and so I started cleaning the dishes and doing and serving and things like that and Christina came in and she goes wow really makes me excited when I see my husband serving me I'm like really okay I'll wash some more dishes the next day there were dishes there what do you think I did I went back in and go hey you want to come in here because I'm washing dishes hard heart right the first time I did it because my focus was on others the second time I did it is because the focus was on me the Christian life is out of control but the amazing thing is God doesn't expect you to be perfect he just wants you to take that next step with him he wants you to take that next step to trust him he wants you to take that next step to understand how much he loves you he wants you to take that next step to understand how much he serves you every day he wants you to take the next step for you to understand how much you do not deserve it and yield your life to him my prayer for us as a church is that we would all be servants and that we'd all be leaders because that's what

[ 34 : 56 ] Christ calls us to that's what Christ calls us to Father we thank you for this day we thank you for your goodness and your mercy in our life we thank you that you never ever give up on us and as we as a church come before you right now in this communion time Lord we pray we pray for our hearts we thank you for your son we thank you for the cross Lord we thank you that you know our hearts you knew everything and still you died on the cross for us Father we thank you that you are not self-focused but you are other focused and that you serve God by serving us and Lord I pray for us as a church that we would understand that truth also that we would serve you by serving others that it would be okay what other people think because we know just like you know you knew where you came from you know who you were and you know where you're going and you knew you had all power and in that same truth we do also because we're your children and we trust you we know where we're coming we know where we're going and I pray as a church

Lord as we come to this communion time that we would meet you and that we be different we love you we pray these things in your son Jesus name amen