

Jesus' Final Days

The Night Jesus Served

John 13:1-17

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Introduction

I want to do a short series by looking at three of Jesus' final days from the perspective of an eye witness, the apostle John. We will look at the night Jesus served, the day Jesus died, and the day Jesus arose. The material for this series comes from a book I recently read by Carl Laferton titled, *Easter Uncut*.¹

Each message will essentially contain two sections. First, *what really happened*. We will look at what John saw. And second, *why it really matters*. We will look at why John believed that what he wrote was so important for us.

What Really Happened

Let's begin by examining what really happened the night Jesus served. Let's read John 13:1-17:

¹Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped

¹ Carl Laferton, *Easter Uncut* (The Good Book Company, 2016).

around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” ⁸ Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” (John 13:1-17)

Why It Really Matters

People in power often use power to serve themselves. This is true in politics, entertainment, business, academics, and even religion. Once a person gets to the top of the pyramid, those who are underneath must serve the person at the top.

After Jesus began his public ministry, he eventually claimed not only to be powerful, but to be all-powerful, not only to be a man, but to be God and man in one person.

So, it is fascinating to see how Jesus used power.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus gathered with his friends to eat the Feast of the Passover, the most important Jewish feast on the calendar. It was a very festive occasion, something like our Thanksgiving. Family and friends would gather for this most special meal.

But there was a problem.

There was no slave to wash the feet of the guests. Remember that people in those days walked wherever they went, and there was dust, dirt, droppings, and dung everywhere. People wore sandals or no shoes at all. And so when they arrived at their destination, there was usually a slave to wash the feet of the arriving guests. Washing feet was the lowest job imaginable. It was so low on the scale of jobs that slaves who had Jewish blood were not required to do it. Only foreign slaves washed guests' feet. Washing people's feet indicated that you were the lowest person in the room.

So, Jesus' followers sat down to eat. No slave had washed their feet. Suddenly, Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Astonished, Jesus' followers watched as he poured water into a basin and began to wash their feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

The all-powerful king of the universe was acting like the lowliest slave on earth. It was astonishing. Why would Jesus do such a thing? There are three reasons.

I. An Awesome Truth

The first reason why the all-powerful king of the universe was acting like the lowliest slave on earth was to reveal an awesome truth: Jesus wants to serve his people.

There is literally nothing Jesus won't do for his people.

There is nothing too difficult, there is nothing too demeaning, there is nothing too disgusting that Jesus will not do in order to express his love for his own.

Jesus could have told someone else to perform the menial task of washing feet. He could even have summoned an angel. But not Jesus. He did it himself. He took it upon himself to serve others by washing their feet.

As you read through John's eyewitness account of Jesus' life—remember, John was with Jesus every day for three years—you will see that Jesus never once ever acted selfishly. It is staggering to think that the all-powerful king of the entire universe, who could rightly have demanded that everyone serve him, served others.

Jesus was, and is, the all-powerful king, who always wants to serve his people, who always does what is best for his people, even if they have not asked him to do so and don't understand what he is doing.

II. An Amazing Claim

The second reason why the all-powerful king of the universe was acting like the lowliest slave on earth was to make an amazing claim: if you live like Jesus did, you will be happy.

We think that people in power are supremely happy. We think that if we can order anyone to do what we want and to get what we want, then we will be happy. Not so, says Jesus! "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you....If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." "Blessed" is the biblical word for happy.

To be "blessed" is to live life as God designed it to be. We think that to be "blessed" is to be and do what we want to be and do. But, that is not true. The truly blessed person is the

person who is living life exactly the way God designed it to be. That is why Jesus was supremely blessed.

Jesus claimed that the path to blessing is not to serve ourselves but to serve others, just as he did. He served his friends, and then he told them to serve others.

This is so contrary to the thinking of the world, isn't it? The world says that we are blessed when we have others serve us and when we get to be and do what we want to be and do. But Jesus said that we are blessed when we serve others, because the all-powerful king serves us.

III. A Deeper Need

And the third reason why the all-powerful king of the universe was acting like the lowliest slave on earth was to point to a deeper need: unless you let Jesus serve you, you cannot be his disciple.

There was an unusual moment as Jesus washed the feet of his followers. He came to one of his disciples, Simon Peter, who said to him in astonishment and disbelief, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

In one sense Peter did understand: Jesus was washing his feet. But Peter did not understand that Jesus was pointing Peter—and the disciples in the room, and us too—to a deeper need that Peter would only understand "afterward." It is a need that Jesus hinted at when he told Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Unless you let me serve you by washing you clean, that is, by cleansing all your sin, you cannot be my disciple." Jesus was telling Peter that washing his feet was not the most difficult thing he would go through in order to serve Peter. Jesus was

saying that Peter's feet, dirty as they were, were not the part of him that most needed cleaning.

Jesus was willing to go even lower than a slave to cleanse his followers. Jesus was willing to suffer and die and experience his Father's unmitigated wrath to cleanse his own. Jesus was willing to experience hell in order to save a people for himself.

Peter did not understand then what Jesus was doing. He would only understand later. The events of the next few days would give Peter all the understanding he would need.

Conclusion

The night Jesus served was an incredible night.

Jesus, the all-powerful king served like the lowliest slave on earth to reveal an awesome truth: Jesus wants to serve his people.

Jesus, the all-powerful king served like the lowliest slave on earth to make an amazing claim: if you live like Jesus did, you will be blessed.

Jesus, the all-powerful king served like the lowliest slave on earth to point to a deeper need: unless you let Jesus serve you, you cannot be his disciple.

Let us give thanks to God for these glorious truths as we remember the night Jesus served. Amen.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz.

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