

I am a servant of God * John 13

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I have two degrees hanging on my wall at home and they're pretty much the same. Except for one little difference. See if you can catch it.

My university degree says 'This is to certify that Graham Wesley Gladstone has completed his Bachelor of Arts degree, with all the attendant rights and privileges, granted this day June 7, 2002.' (I have yet to receive a list of those privileges – I don't get a discount at Bulk Barn or anything)...

But my seminary degree says this: 'The Board of Directors has conferred upon Graham Wesley Gladstone the Master of Divinity with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities appertaining thereto.'

Did you catch the difference? My university degree says I have rights and privileges; my seminary degree says I have rights and privileges and responsibilities. As a member of the graduating class of Heritage, I have both rights AND responsibilities.

It's the same way in the family of God. In any family, really. If you are a member of a family, there are rights and there are responsibilities. Rights – you can do certain things because you are a part of that family – if your family owns a farm, you get farm fresh food; if your family runs a business, you benefit from whatever they do – but there are also responsibilities. Talking with my aunts and uncles last week to prepare for grandma's memorial, they said there was always work to do. You get home from school; you get right to work, taking the laundry in, peeling potatoes. Being a part of a family involves both privileges and responsibilities.

And that's the way it is in God's family too. We have work to do. Think back to our first message – we are God's workmanship, created to do God's works. Ephesians 2:10 - 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. This message brings us back around to the beginning – not only are we God's workmanship, not only are we sinners saved by grace, not only are we children of God, not only are we members of Jesus' family – we are servants of God, created and called to do God's good work in the world.

To show you why I say that, I want to look with you today at a very famous story in the Gospels; the foot-washing scene in John 13. We're going to spend most of our time there today so turn with me to John 13 and we'll talk about what it means to be servants of God. John 13, verse 1.

NIV John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.

3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;

4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

Think about that for a moment. From a worldly point of view, that sentence doesn't make any sense. The words before the 'so' don't line up with the words after the 'so.'

Usually if a sentence starts 'He knew that He had all the power in the world' then the part after the 'so' should go – 'so, He insisted that His inferiors serve Him.' That's how it works, right? The coach for Toronto Maple Leafs is in charge of the whole team – SO – he has somebody else fill the water bottles.

The President of the United States is the leader of the free world – SO – he has people to clean toilets and do His laundry. Generally speaking, the powerFUL are served by the less powerful.

And yet here, Jesus turns that on His head. He had all the power in the world. He knew He came from God and so He was divine in origin. He knew He was going back to God and who else could claim THAT privilege? By the ways of the world, His 'RIGHT' would have been to have the disciples get down on their hands and knees and wash His feet. The very Son of God is Lord of all – SO – He had the disciples do the menial work of a servant.

And yet, that's not what He did, is it? The Son of God knew all power belonged to Him, SO, He used that power to serve His people. He used His power and privilege as the Son of God to serve His people. (As Mark 10:45 says "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Mar 10:45 NIV). And verse 5 tells us how He did it -

5 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.

He got down on His hands and knees, braved the stink of sweaty feet, wiped the grit and grime off them with His own hands and then carefully dried their feet with the towel that He Himself was wearing. The Son of God served His disciples.

And that didn't make any sense to them. They were still thinking along the world's lines. Peter says – 'Lord, are YOU going to wash MY feet? Are YOU my superior going to wash MY feet? That's crazy!'

I know the queen celebrated her 70th anniversary as Queen of England last week and she wrote a nice letter to her people. And I saw that she signed that royal letter – 'Your servant, Elizabeth' – but there's no way Queen Elizabeth is going to show up at your door with a vacuum cleaner in hand.ⁱ The powerless serve the powerFUL. And yet Jesus says 'that's not how we do things in my family.' If you want to be great in God's Kingdom, you need to learn to be the servant of all.

And there's some back and forth about that between Jesus and the disciples and then verse 12

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12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them.

13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.

14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

What's Jesus done here? He's called His people to be servants of God. He set an example for us to follow, saying – 'If I, your Lord and Teacher, your Saviour and superior, would be willing to serve you like that, you too should be willing to serve one another.' When we become members of Jesus' family, we also become servants of God.

V. 16 - "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master" – the implication here is that we are His servants and Jesus is the master – and if the master was willing to wash our feet – frankly, to go to the Cross to die to win us sinners back by grace – then we ought to be willing to be His servants.

If you are a follower of Jesus, then you are called to be a servant of God. And I think that's important for us to wrap our minds around. When I first came to faith, I was more than happy to talk about all the rights and privileges accorded to me as a child of God and I would go to church and revel in the love that God had for me and that's great. I think a lot of people do that. They go to church for what they can get out of it.

But there's more to faith than rights and privileges, isn't there? There are responsibilities too and if we are children of God, then we are called to follow in Jesus' footsteps to be servants in the world.

If you are a child of God, then you are a servant of God too.

Now I realize that that can be a bit of an abstract idea, so I sat and thought to myself, 'What does it mean for me to think about myself as a servant of God?' 'How does being a servant of God impact how I think and what I do?' And I think I'd put it like this –

If I'm a servant of God, then my priority will be to do the Master's will. To put His purposes first, to put mine in the backseat if they don't line up with His. If I am a servant of God, then I am going to want to do what my Master calls me to do.

And what does God call me to do? Well, slide your finger down just a bit farther to verse 34 - 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Joh 13:34-35 NIV).

We are servants of God and the Master calls us to love one another the way He loved us. Selflessly. Whole heartedly. We are servants of God, called to do the Master's will, to serve one another in love.

That's the take home here. We are servants of God, called to do the Master's will, to serve one another in love. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, reaching out to care for people in the world. Jesus can't literally wash their feet now – He's in Heaven – but WE'RE here – and that's our job now.

When I was in university, I played on worship teams a couple of times with this guy Shad – he's gone on to be a Juno prize winning hip hop artist and he has this song where he's lamenting the fact that people out in the world don't have enough to eat. And I'm not going to rap like him, but he says –

*'Like, Lord please, can we speak on this frankly?
Like, God why you letting this happen? Amen
He answered, son, I'm asking you the same thing
'Cause you're supposed to be my servants out there workin'
Like you're my hands reaching out to those that's hurtin'ⁱⁱ*

We sometimes like to think that God should just miraculously make things right, but you know what? That's (in part) our job. These acts of service are the good works that God created us for in advance – as Ephesians 2:10 says.

We've got a job to do. Join the family business, blessing the world, as God intends for us to do.

So let's try to think about this in practical terms.

Are you a child of God? Yes. Then that means that you are a member of God's family? Right? There are privileges and rights that come along with that – eternal life, the right to be called 'children of God, the Holy Spirit in us – but there are responsibilities too. There's chores to do. We are servants of God, devoted to doing the Master's will, which is to extend His love into the world.

Now I think that as a church, we are doing really well here. The sense I get is that if there's something that needs to be done, everybody pitches in to do it. Why Not meal – need food? Got it. Done. Communion coming up? Yeah, we'll pitch in and help. Sand the whole sanctuary and refinish it to give the whole thing a sparkle? Why not. You as a church excel at serving. At a previous church, the pastor did a whole six week sermon series on having hearts of servants because people were grumbling about having to put on coffee for fellowship time before the service. They didn't want to do themselves. You're beyond that. As a church, we are without a doubt servant hearted.

But I don't follow you home after church, so I have no idea what you're like in your everyday life. And I assume it's the same way, but just to be on the safe side, I'll say this – 'being a servant of God doesn't end when you leave the church.' Being a servant of God is a round the clock, 24/7, 365 days a year thing.

I'm not just a parent; I am a servant of God who is parenting children. You're not just a teacher, you are a servant of God who teaches. You're not just an administrator, you are a servant of God who organizes other people. How can you engage in your family or workplace as a servant of God, extending God's love to other people?

Remember, Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He did not cling to divinity but became human, taking the nature of a servant, dying on the Cross to win us back to God; how can you apply that selfless, servant-heartedness in your own situation? Jesus calls us to love one another as He loved us – that's deeply, redemptively, selflessly.

I can bring you some principles and say – see yourself as a servant of God, do nothing out of selfish ambition and vain conceit; look out not only for your interests but also the interests of others – but you need to do the work of working out the specifics in your life. So what does it look like for you to be a servant of God in your present situation?

We are servants of God, tasked with doing the Master's good will.

Getting ready for today, I came across a poem often attributed to Teresa of Avila – it goes it like –

“Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.”

We are servants of God, responsible for doing the Master's good will.

ⁱ <https://www.facebook.com/langfordcommunitychurchca/photos/a.105993925258825/129901716201379>

ⁱⁱ Shad, 'Compromise,' from the album *The Old Prince*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TaFqPYLjZw>