

The Greatest Among You Will Be Your Servant

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Preacher: Tom Holland

[0:00] In the Greek language, which I know nothing about, I would have to defer to Brother Ralph on being a Greek authority.

! It wouldn't be me. But essentially, there are three primary words for love. One of them is Eros, that's more sensual and it's not in the Bible.

One of them is Phileo, which means I like you a whole bunch. We get the word Philadelphia, city of brotherly love from Phileo.

Now, I've been there and it's not, but that's what they call it, the city of brotherly love. And then Agape, that's the highest possible love.

That's sacrificial love. Think of Agape in these terms. Agape is the level of love that will send an innocent man to a cross to die for others.

[1:06] So that's the highest level. But when it comes to love, the world has lost its way. The world is blind.

Love in our day is very self-serving. If you don't like your spouse, just get a new one. Dump that one. Get a new one.

I actually know a man in this town who has dumped wife number three. Currently splitting time between two women trying to decide who will be wife number four. As I told a police officer one time who was good at that, I said, look, quit marrying women.

Just find a girl and buy her a house once a month. I mean, that's what he ended up doing. He's paying for about four houses now. When it comes to love in our day, it is based upon self-gratification and it is very self-serving.

Very self-serving. That, of course, runs counter to the biblical description of love. Because there we find the highest expression of love and it is linked to self-sacrifice and to service to others.

[2:22] Biblical love never pursues its own interests. But it always is tuned in to the needs of others. It seeks to meet the needs of others.

And if you were here this morning, the message tonight is going to sort of dovetail with what we're talking about this morning. And it's totally by accident if there is any such thing in the church, the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, if you really want to know the pure definition of love, and if you want to know how Christ loves, then read and even memorize 1 Corinthians chapter 13, you know, the great chapter on love.

There we have the defining passage on love. And that's in Paul's letter there. No one who does not possess a healthy dose of humility will ever be able to love with a level of love that is described in that chapter.

That is an amazing chapter. Only the humble person will put the needs of others in front of himself or herself. Now, the world is hung up on things like pride and respect.

[3:38] I often hear, and I'll get complaints on police officers, and it only happens once or twice a day. But usually Mondays are dedicated to complaint day.

And they will say, well, he disrespected me. I'm not sure that's a word. Is that a word, you English teachers? I wonder what would have happened if I told Miss Metcalf she disrespected me when I was in the first grade at Highland Park School.

I know what would have happened. That's not even a word. He disrespected me. The true mark of greatness is humility. It's humility.

In fact, it's one of the fruits of a saved life. We've been going over that on Monday nights. It's a fruit of a saved life, a humble spirit. Now, we all know that the Lord Jesus is the greatest example of love in the Bible.

The highest expression of love was to die on the cross for the sins of his people. Philippians says he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross.

[4:45] If you're keeping score, that's Philippians 2.8. In John 15.13, greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

Now, if you ever question whether Christ loved you, remember he laid down his life for you. That is the greatest expression of love. Of course he loves you. He died for you.

He took your place. I should have been on that cross. You should have been on that cross.

Anybody but Christ should have been on that cross. And we come today, this evening, to one of the glowing examples of Christ's love and humility.

And this is the account of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. I'm always drawn to that. Amazing section of scripture. Let me start in John chapter 13, verse 1.

Now, before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come, that he would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

[5:55] Jesus is in town. And that town, by the way, was Jerusalem. And he's there for the Passover. And that, of course, commemorates the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

We talked about a little bit of that this morning. The name comes from the fact that the death angel passed over the Hebrew homes on which the blood had been applied on the doorposts, and the lintel above the doorposts.

He passed over. The angel of death passed over. If the blood has been applied to your heart, the angel of death will pass over.

You will never die. And you say, wait a minute, when people die, Christians die. Oh, that's just physical death. We're talking about spiritual death. You will never suffer physical death. Death to the Christian is God's limousine to get us to him.

That's just physical death. But in Egypt, when the angel did not see the blood applied, of course, he struck dead the firstborn in that home.

[7:03] All of the firstborn of Egypt died on that night. John again tells us that the time of the Lord's death had come. He would very soon depart out of this world.

He would be reunited with the Father. The Lord himself was sovereignly controlling all of the events leading up to his death. Never think that any of that caught him by surprise or off guard.

He was orchestrating this. And he was not subject to the evil schemes of men, although they were responsible for their evil schemes.

He was above those. Though his time of departure was at hand, the word says he loved his children to the end. Now, that does not mean he loved them until he died.

The word in there means perfection and completeness. He loved them perfectly and completely.

[8:03] His love was to the fullest measure possible. In fact, Paul made it very clear that nothing could separate us from that love. I think we're just saying that.

Let me read that great passage in Romans 8. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?

Just as it is written, for your sake we are being put to death all day long. We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered. But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let's just take three of those. Nothing in life, nothing in death, nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of Christ. Just as a complete aside, I always like to tell this story.

[9:10] I remember when Tom White, the director of VOM and my good friend, when he was in prison in Cuba, the plane he was smuggling Bibles with crash landed on a highway. They strewn out thousands of Spanish Bibles.

The military police got there in about two minutes and said, where did all these Bibles come from?

And Tom goes, no say. No say. I don't know. You know, they put him in prison for 25 years.

Mother Teresa got him out and the pilot out for 18 months. But he served most of it in solitary confinement. There was a captain there that was very, very hard.

And he was trying to convert Tom White to communism. And he gave him a book on, you know, praising. And it was in Spanish. And Tom is fluent in Spanish.

He gave him this book on how destructive Christianity is and why everybody should be a communist. And in the middle of the book, the author said, let me give you an example. And he writes verbatim the entire eighth chapter of Romans.

[10:11] So Tom is given the eighth chapter of Romans while he's in confinement, in solitary. And he'd read it. And the captain, he'd go see the captain. And Captain Santos was his name. He said, well, you're reading the book.

Oh, I love that. Can I keep? Can I keep? Oh, yes. Yes, you can. He kept that book for like 16 of 18 months. And every day he read the eighth chapter of Romans. Well, there are many at the supper that Jesus attended, among them Satan himself.

We sometimes lose sight of that because it says, during the supper, the devil, having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him.

Satan was very active at that moment. Here we see in this passage a major shift from the light of Christ to the utter darkness of Satan.

Here we have the Lord who is about to perform the most humbling and loving thing in washing the feet of the disciples. At the same time, we have Satan here filling the heart of Judas to betray the Lord.

[11:19] Now, don't pass over on this because it's an important point. In spite of that and in spite of the fact that Christ is all-knowing, he's a creator God, he's sovereign, he knew exactly what Judas was going to do, he went ahead and washed his feet.

He washed the feet of Judas along with the other disciples. Some try and paint a picture of Judas. And Hollywood's really good at this.

They paint a picture of Judas as a little confused, sort of a victim of the circumstances in regard to his betrayal of the Lord. In reality, Judas was completely and totally responsible for his actions.

And he would receive the just punishment for his sins. Judas was brought to the supper by the sovereignty of God. He betrayed the Lord in accord with the sovereignty of God.

But the sin of betrayal was his doing. And upon his head, as the Scriptures say, it would have been better had Judas never been born.

[12:33] It would have been a lot better. Unless we get puffed up about the fact that we didn't betray the Lord, remember when Jesus informed the disciples that one of them would betray him.

One by one, they looked at Jesus and said, Is it I, Lord? Is it I? Each disciple saw within himself the capacity to be the betrayer.

They knew their thoughts. They knew their doubts. And they saw within themselves, each one, the capacity to be the betrayer. And in truth, every believer at some point in his or her life sees that in the same light.

If Jesus came into this room tonight and said, I love you all, but one of you is a betrayer, every one of our hearts would just melt. And we would be asking ourselves, if not the Lord, is it I, Lord?

Is it I? The truth is, every believer has the capacity to betray him from time to time. Now, we're going to see a little bit more on Judas here in a moment.

[13:44] Let me read verses 3 to 11 in John 13. Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper and laid aside his garments, and taking a towel, he girded himself.

Then he poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. So he came to Simon Peter.

He said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? You love Peter, don't you? Jesus answered and said to him, What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.

Peter said to him, Never shall you wash my feet. Pretty emphatic, isn't it? You're not going to wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head. Give me a bath. Jesus said to him, He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean.

[14:58] And you are clean, but not all of you. For he knew that the one who was betraying him, for this reason he said, Not all of you are clean.

Jesus knows he's about to return to the Father. This is reiterated many times in John in the Synoptic Gospels. Please get a vision of this scene.

The creator and sovereign king of the universe is about to stoop down and wash the dirty feet of his disciples.

No one less than the creator of the universe. This was a task in Israel reserved for the lowest of the lowly slaves.

This was the last job. This was the bottom rung among slaves. Not even Jewish slaves were required to do this. Only Gentile slaves.

[16:01] They didn't even require Jews, though they were slaves, to do that. Now, Jesus certainly is no God of our imagination. He is the God of the universe. But one of the proofs, there are so many proofs that the Bible is the Word of God, written by the Spirit of God.

Mankind, men, women, would never create a God in their own mind and then write a book about him where he had them, where they had this God washing the feet of his subjects.

I mean, just like his birth. If we were creating the story of some fictional God, we wouldn't have him born in a manger, in a stable filled with animals and manure.

We wouldn't do that. Being laid in a food trough, we wouldn't do that. And no human mind can conceive of God washing the feet of his subjects.

This came from God's mind and not ours. Only the true God would come up with such a plan and such an expression of humility. Jesus was here living out the fact, as he had already told them, the greatest among you will be your servant.

[17:20] And what an example. Peter, who often had the right thing to say at the worst possible moments and the wrong things to say at the correct moment, asked the Lord if he's going to wash his feet as well as the other disciples.

Jesus indicated that he was. Peter, of course, interjects. And Peter and the others would not understand the significance of what was going on at that particular moment.

The Lord told him that. By that, he meant that the Holy Spirit would have to come and illuminate their comprehension of what was occurring later, after Jesus had risen and ascended and he sent the Holy Spirit.

Peter, of course, objects. And he tells the Lord, Lord, you are never going to wash my feet. And on the one hand, I think we can identify with Peter, you know, for his modesty.

You know, when Jesus walked on water and got in the boat, and he said, Lord, depart from me. I'm a sinful man, you know. I can't even be around you. But Jesus prefers obedience.

[18:30] That's what he wants is obedience. The foot washing was an expression of a spiritual cleansing that only occurs to those who place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through God's irresistible call.

That's what he was doing there. That's what he was talking about. Without this washing, no one would have Jesus as his or her Savior. Peter, in keeping with his impulsive nature, went to the opposite extreme.

And he often did that. He wanted Jesus to wash his entire body. Jesus said to him, Peter, once a person is washed, it is not necessary to wash their whole body again, but only the feet that pick up the dust of the road.

While that is certainly true physically, there is a much deeper spiritual application. You and I, if we're one with Christ, we're cleansed at redemption.

God justified us in his sight at that moment. Justification is a legal declaration by God that you are without sin.

[19:53] And only God can do that. Only God can do that. It is a legal standing with God. But, even though saved, we constantly pick up the dust of sin in this life.

Our feet get dirty every day, don't they? And they need to be cleaned. How do you clean spiritual feet that pick up the dirt and dust of sin?

You do that by confession. 1 John 1.9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I like to say, when you sin, you're convicted, you go to the Lord right then, you see that sin with his eyes, you say, yes, Lord, that was wrong, I confess it.

That word confession means name it for what it is, tell the Lord, and the Scripture gives a promise. When you do that, the Lord will cleanse you of that sin.

[20:55] He'll forgive that sin. And then he takes it a step further, cleanse you of all unrighteousness. What about the sins we don't even realize we've committed as we go through this life?

He cleanses us of all sin. It's an amazing passage. Don't undertake anything spiritual without going to 1 John 1.9. End your night with 1 John 1.9. Begin your day with 1 John 1.9.

Fabulous section of Scripture. Fabulous section. Jesus then declared, you are all cleaning. You are all clean.

Meaning they were all saved or soon would be. Then he adds something that's really frightening.

He says, but not all of you. Not all of them were clean.

Oh, their feet had been cleaned. Physically. But not all of them were clean. Jesus knew that Judas was unsaved.

[21:54] Judas didn't lose his salvation. We understand that, don't we? Judas was never saved. He never placed his faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was a typical Jew looking for a military, political Messiah. And I really, I've always understood that for a long time.

But as I'm working through this year, through the entire Bible, and I just started Job, I've gotten that far. You know, when you're in Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, there's a lot of war.

There's a lot of killing. This is the Jewish concept. Send the Messiah, God, so we can get out of these wars. That was their concept. That they thought the Messiah would come, kill all the Romans, sit on a throne, and build little thrones for them.

And actually, the day is coming when the Messiah will return and establish his throne. And there will be only believers. And that day is coming. But the Jews missed the Old Testament meaning of that.

[23:04] See, they struggled in the Old Testament because they would read passages like, He's the lion of the tribe of Judah. And then they would read, He was pierced for our transgressions.

That He suffered and He died. And they would look at that and they couldn't rationalize that. They couldn't reconcile that. They thought at one point there were two Messiahs.

One who was going to rule and one who was going to suffer and die. They came up with a dual Messiah concept. What they didn't see was a dual advent. You know what I mean by that?

He came at Bethlehem. He's coming again. So we've got a mountain over here called the Incarnation. We have a mountain over here called the Return of Christ. In the middle is a valley between these two great mountains called the Church Age.

And so far, we've been in that for 2,000 years. And I don't know how long it's going to last. It may last for another 5,000 years. It may last for another five minutes.

[24:06] I have a feeling we're closer to five minutes than we are to 5,000 years. But the Church Age will come to an end when we have the return of Christ. So here we have Judas.

He is an unbeliever, never received Christ. Satan enters into his heart, fills him with this tremendous evil.

The Scripture goes on, So when he had washed their feet and taken his garment and reclined at the table again, he said to them, Do you know what I've done to you?

You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the teacher, washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet.

For I gave you an example that you should also do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.

[25:10] If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. You know, I read one theologian that said, Wouldn't it have been something when Jesus started washing those feet if he turned around and a couple of disciples had gone and got water and towels and they were starting to wash feet?

Wouldn't that have been something? You know, I think that's really what the Lord was wanting. He's wanting these guys. He's leaving. And he's going to have to strengthen them.

And Peter was the center of all that to carry on the ministry after he's gone. And he's wanting to get that servant, humble attitude passed on to his disciples.

So here we have the true meaning of the section of Scripture. Everything they have learned to this point was vitally important, but now the greatest message comes to them.

They are to be like Christ. That's the message. They are to be like Christ. And guess what? That message is alive and well today.

[26:14] We are to be like Christ. Christ-likeness. We're being conformed to the image of Christ. That's the whole process of sanctification. You've been justified. You are being sanctified, recreated in the image of Christ.

Christ. I've always said the kids had it right. They wore those little bands. What would Jesus do? Of course, I want to come out with one said he would do righteously or he would do right. He would do correctly.

We're being recreated in Christ-likeness. They are to be servants at a level that the Son of God himself achieved. That's what he desires.

You know, these guys, and you think back in your studies of the New Testament, they had bickered over who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. Can you imagine? And they'd go to Jesus and say, you know, I want to sit at your right hand.

Don't pick that guy. I want to do that. A couple of them sent Mommy and said, go ask Jesus if we can be the greatest in the kingdom. Can you imagine?

[27:20] My youngest son Rob would have been so humiliated if Diane did that. They bickered over who was going to be the greatest. And now they knew.

They knew who was going to be the greatest. The greatest would be the one who would stoop down to wash the feet of the humblest followers of Christ.

That was going to be the greatest in the kingdom of God. And I'll tell you, there's some great members of the body of Christ on this earth today. I'm sure there's some in this room.

I know some of you. There are. But I'm thinking of the brothers and sisters I've got to visit around the world in the persecuted church. They live things like this. They live this.

And I can't remember her name and I apologize for that. A Baptist missionary in China many years ago. And they brought in a coulee.

[28:19] A Chinese coulee. He drove a rickshaw. That is the lowest of the low class in China. This was 100 years ago. He had been horribly burned. She was a nurse.

She took skin. She had them graft skin off her body to put them on that Chinese man. She got an infection and died from that.

the greatest in the kingdom. The greatest in the kingdom. I remember Dr. Graham one time talking and he said, you know, in Heaven's newspaper you're going to see a little filler.

You know what a filler is in the newspaper? Just a little. They run out of... They need to plug something in there. You're going to see a little filler on Billy Graham on page 73.

It's going to say Billy Graham married well. That's all it's going to say. I was in the room when he said that. There were 8,000 of us in the room so I want to be a little humble there.

[29:20] And someone asked him, well, Dr. Graham, if that's true, who's going to be on page one? And Dr. Graham said, missionaries, you and I have never heard of.

We've never heard of them. In fact, Dr. Graham went on to say he and Leighton Ford, and I met him, had flown into Africa on a mission trip years ago, 30, 40 years ago.

And they landed in a little dirt strip in the middle of nowhere in Africa, hot, 140 degrees. The Southern Baptist missionary had set up a tent and he had some tea, didn't have any ice.

He had some little biscuits, little cookies, just to, so when they refueled the aircraft, he had heard that Dr. Graham and Dr. Ford were coming. They got off the airplane.

They were so a priest, even he was out there in the heat doing this. And one of them said, well, how long have you been on the mission field here in Africa? And he said, 23 years. They said, really?

[30:24] He said, how many converts do you have? He said, one and maybe two. And Leighton Ford told me personally, he said, I'll never forget my stupid response to that.

I looked at him, I said, one convert in 23 years, why do you stay here? And he said, that missionary's mouth fell open. And he looked at me and he said, because God put me here.

What an answer. The humble, the humblest will be the greatest in the kingdom of Christ. Well, this can be achieved when we come to the realization that a slave is never greater than his master.

If the master, and we know his name, don't we, Christ Jesus, does this, kneels down as the lowliest slave and performs such an act as washing the feet of the disciples, then we too can rise to such a level of kneeling down and doing those menial things which we think are menial, but they're really not.

That's you and I he's talking about. That's you and I. I always remember the meeting I had once with Haddon Robinson, probably not a name, but a lot of people realize he is the dean of professors

of homiletics in America, probably the world.

[31:49] He's in his 80s now. And I got to be with Dr. Robinson. Almost every preacher knows Dr. Robinson because he wrote the textbook on homiletics, on preaching. Professor of homiletics teaches preachers to preach.

That's what he does. And he had a dream one night that he went to the Lord and he's standing there and the Lord's looking for any good works he might have done. He said he kept turning page after page after page and he couldn't find anything.

And he said all of a sudden he came, he said, oh, here's something. And Dr. Robinson in his dream he had snuck in his diary through the portals of heaven so he had his diary with him. And the Lord said, I'm glad you brought that, Haddon.

He said, look up. And he gave him a date. And Haddon Robinson said, I remember that date. That's the day that I published a paper on the hermeneutics of homiletics.

And the Lord looked at him and said, no, Haddon, that's not what I'm talking about. He said, I remember you doing that paper and I read the title. I didn't know what you meant by that. So I didn't bother reading it. He said, no, on that day there was a young woman sitting in the back of your classroom when you were leaving that was crying.

[32:59] And you went up to her and talked to her and asked her what was wrong. And her brother had just died in a car wreck. Six weeks earlier her father had died of cancer. And you prayed with her, you gave her scriptures, you and your wife Bonnie went, you ministered to her.

He said, that's what I was referring to. And then he gave him another page and he said, oh, here's something else. This was really good. And he gave him the date and hadn't looked up in his calendar and it was something absurd, you know.

And he said, no, the Lord said, that's not what I had in mind. That was the day that you went home and Bonnie said there was a young married student and his wife and they had a 25-day paycheck and a 30-day month.

They were out of money and had no food. And he said, you and Bonnie went over. You put some money in an envelope about midnight. You went into the dorm. Everyone's asleep.

You stuck that envelope under the door of those two kids so they could eat. He said, do you remember that, Haddon? He said, Lord, I don't remember that. He said, Bonnie's better at remembering those things than I am.

[34:05] I don't remember that. And he said in his dream, Jesus looked at him and said, I remember that. I'll never forget that. That's what it's all about.

The greatest among you will be your servant.