

SERIES: While Going - Week 2

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I want to pick it up in [John 13] verse four,

[He] 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?"⁷ 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!" 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." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have 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 also ought to wash one another's feet. (NASB, John 13:4-14)

It was the custom in the day that when people had been out the street gathered into a home or in this case in the upper room, that a servant would wash the feet and if it wasn't the servant than it was typically the host. We know from the other gospels that the disciples were arguing about who is the greatest in the kingdom. Therefore, none of the disciples were willing to disqualify themselves by washing feet, so that's the context into which Jesus, the creator of the universe made flesh, picks up a towel and takes a basin and begins to wash their feet. Now, we don't really have to guess the reason; Jesus tells them the reason. The reason is that He was giving them an example, in essence saying, this is how I'm asking you to represent Me to the world. Not with anger, not with debate and arguments, but with the heart of a servant.

I think it's worth asking ourselves, is that actually how we do life?

Jesus kind of summarizes this discussion in verse 34,

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Vs. 34-35)

How had Jesus loved them? Answer, he had washed their feet, so they said, this is what I'm asking of you. The identifying mark of a disciple of Christ would be the heart of a servant.

So here's the question. Be honest with yourself. When you leave the house every morning, do you leave with the heart of a servant? Do you enter your day saying, this is going to be about me ... or, this is going to be about others? This is going to be about building my kingdom, or God, this is going to be about building your Kingdom. Do I go through my day as a consumer or do I go through my day as a servant? Oswald Sanders once said, greatness is not determined by the number of one's servants, but by the number one serves. So, we ask ourselves, is that actually how we go through life? I think sometimes, maybe we're willing to wash feet, but we wash them in boiling water. I would suggest to you that there has been a lot of damage done in the name of Jesus under the umbrella of "tough love". It's the heart of a servant that washes feet. Is it possible that God is asking you to wash the feet of the most irritating person you have at work? The student that everybody picks on? Isn't it possible that if the God of the universe was willing to wash the feet of prideful, arrogant self-righteous disciples, that maybe he's asking us to rightly represent him to the world? Not by being debaters, not by picking a fight, but by washing feet.

Paul picks up this theme in Philippians chapter one. Philippians is really all about Paul's passion to represent the Gospel.

In verse 12 of Chapter One he says,

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,

He's talking there about the fact that he is writing from a prison cell and he does not know if he's going to be released or if he's going to be executed, but rather than whining and complaining about that, he's viewing it through the lens of how might God use this for the advantage of the Gospel? He talks about his access to the Praetorian guard an elite Roman guard that Paul never would have had access to unless he was imprisoned. He views life through the lens of, how might God use these circumstances to advance the Gospel? It's a very interesting way to view life.

Everything that we face, the ups, the downs, the goods, the bads, the struggles, the joys. What if we actually framed those around this idea of how might God use this to advance the Gospel? What about a heart surgery? What about a cancer? What about a rebellious child? What about his struggle at work? Whatever it is, what if we viewed life through the lens of how might God use this as a way to advance the Good News of Jesus? To think that way would require the heart of a servant.

I think Paul summarizes this discussion of verse 21,

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. He goes on in verse 27 and he says, **Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,** (Vs. 27a)

That word conduct is a Greek word that literally means a citizen, and then the idea of *a manner worthy of the Gospel*. He's actually picking up on something that was common in the city of Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, and because Philippi was a Roman colony, it gave them a lot of advantages, a lot of perks because of their connection to the Roman empire. And so, the idea of conduct was the idea that as citizens of Rome, they needed to live worthy of that in essence to maintain that designation. So, the idea of a manner worthy is picking up on a theme that in Philippi, when people would see one another in the streets, they would often greet one another by saying, "live worthy, live worthy". Paul's picking that up and saying, we as Christians are citizens of Heaven and we need to remind one another to live worthy of that designation. What is the heartbeat of the Gospel? And do we rightly represent that heartbeat in the circumstances, in the environments of life?

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. (Vs. 27)

That phrase striving together, it's an interesting phrase. The word striving is the Greek word from which we get our English word athlete, so literally it's athletes together. We would probably just use the word team, that we together are a team, working together for the cause of Christ. I have long maintained that churches get in conflict because they lack vision. Show me a church that's always in conflict. I'll show you a church that has no vision. At some point, there has to be a vision big enough that says we lay our differences aside for the greater cause of the Gospel, striving together as one team. That's in essence what he just said.

Pick it up in Chapter Two verse one.

Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, (Vs. 1-5)

And then Paul goes into this magnificent reminder that Jesus was in the glories of Heaven, that he gave that up to come to earth to become a man, ultimately to die on a cross for the sins of the world, was buried and resurrected and returned to glory. If Jesus was willing to do that for us as sinners, then what would it mean to rightly represent that attitude to the world? To actually think

of others as more important than ourselves? To live for something more than just me. So Paul's picking up this theme that the heartbeat of Jesus is to think of others, is to sacrifice, is to give ourselves up for the cause of the Gospel.

It's really important to understand when we're talking about sharing our faith, we're not talking about a method. We're not talking about a technique or a gimmick. We're talking about genuinely representing the heart of Jesus to the world, entering into the world with the heart of a servant, with a heart to serve, with a heart to rightly represent Jesus. And we do that both here and there.

I want to make this very practical, so let's spend a little bit of time thinking about the church gathered and the church scattered. It's very important to understand to biblically be the church, the church gathers. It's a time when the people of God gather together as the people of God. We gather to worship. We sing praises to God, but we also sing about God to one another. So, we're reminding ourselves what's true and what we live for. One of the challenges I think we have is a perspective, and that is that we are so convinced, for most people Sunday is a day off, and so we think that way; we click it off. It's a day of rest. To rightly understand Sabbath rest is to understand seven days a week, I rest in the finished work of Jesus. That's the rest. Sunday when the church gathers isn't a day to be off, it's a day to be on. It's a day that is very strategic to the mission. Maybe we rethink that it isn't just something I slip in and slip out of. Maybe it isn't something I check off the list so I can run to a soccer game or a ball game. Maybe it isn't just a day where I gather with the same people, my same friends in the hall, and then go home. Maybe it's actually more strategic than that.

Are you aware of the fact that every weekend people walk through these doors that are absolutely hanging by a thread? They are not sure they want to live one more day. They are not sure they will ever know happiness or joy again. They're wondering if they'll ever be loved, if they will ever be accepted, if life will ever have meaning to them. It could be that a week ago everything was fine and this week their life has been devastated and they're just hanging on by a thread. Just because you and your family are fine doesn't mean everybody around you is fine. The stakes are very high when we gather; there's people's lives that are at risk.

One of my favorite memories is one particular Sunday morning, I happened to notice a woman seated in a different section all by herself and from the moment the service started, she began to weep. I knew who this woman was. I knew what her story was. I knew why she was all alone, and I knew why she was weeping and my heart went out to her. Then in another section, a woman stood up, she walked over, she gave this woman a hug. The woman embraced her, they cried together and then this woman stayed with her through the duration of the service. After the service and people had kind of cleared out, I went to the woman who had been weeping and I said, you know, I just talked to her a little bit about her story, and I'm praying for her, and I said, it was really neat that your friend came up and came and sat with you for the service. She said it was really neat, but I'd never met that woman before in my life. She just said she couldn't stand to see me in pain, be alone for the service. So, she came and she sat with her. That was a woman on mission.

Do you understand from the moment somebody pulls onto the parking lot to the moment they pull out of the parking lot, everything that happens matters?

Typically on my weekends when I don't preach, on a vacation weekend, I go to church somewhere else in town. One particular Sunday I went to the Church of one of my pastor friends and I was going against the traffic. I pulled in. By the time I figured it out, it was a mess. They were honking at me. They were yelling at me, they were pointing at me. I was very embarrassed and when I finally got rearranged and finally found a parking place and took a deep breath, I sat there for a minute and I thought to myself, I do not want to go in that building. Now think of that. I'm a pastor and the pastor of that church is a dear friend of mine, but I was this close to saying, I'm outta' here and I'm going home. From the moment somebody pulls onto the property to the moment they pull off, everything matters.

It all matters and it's important to realize that's going on for someone and we all have a responsibility to be on mission when we gather.

Cara: Earlier you talked about using any circumstance to advance the Gospel. Paul had this attitude with his guards in prison, so could you fill us in a little more on that story?

Bryan: Yeah, so I love Philippians one as it relates to this conversation about advancing the Gospel. So the whole thing is about circumstances. And the believers in Philippi are confused because they think if Paul's the great church planter and God's on his side, everything should be working out. And yet since Paul has left Philippi, went to Rome, got arrested for preaching the Gospel, ends up in a jail for two years in Caesarea, appeals to Rome because he's a Roman citizen, gets on a ship to go to Rome, the ship has a ship wreck because of a storm. The boat falls to pieces. They end up on the island of Malta. He's gathering wood for a fire. He's bit by a poisonous snake. He survives that, but he's stranded for months. He finally makes it to Rome and now he's in a Roman prison. And they're struggling with the idea of God is on your side? How do you explain that? And Paul's in a completely different place.

He's like, I am so excited because these circumstances advance the Gospel. So, in that text, he's talking about what an amazing opportunity. I'm in a prison chained to two Praetorian guards. They probably rotated every six hours. So over the course of 24 hours, the Praetorian guards were like the Navy Seals of the Roman military, highly influential. He's like, these guys are chained to me. They can't get away. What an amazing opportunity. He's seen them come to Christ and they have so much influence that it's starting this wave. And so, you know, from a human point of view, it'd be like, what sense does this make? This is your best church planter. And he sits in a jail for two years in Caesarea, he sits on an island, he gets in this shipwreck, he's in a Roman prison, and humanly speaking, it'd be like, let the guy out so we can plant churches, and it would be easy for Paul to think, woe is me. God doesn't love me. Life is unfair. And he's just seen every circumstance as a chance to advance the Gospel.

Cara: What an awesome attitude change.