

The Word Became Flesh

Foot Washing

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 13:1-17

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For the last few years, we have been taking a few weeks, every so often, kind of starting and stopping this series through the Book of John that we have called "The Word Became Flesh." This is actually lesson number 27, and we've only made it to chapter 13, all right? So if you want to open your Bibles, you can to John chapter 13. That's where we're going to begin today. And if you've missed the previous 26 messages on John, it's okay. Everything will still make sense to you today.

We'll kind of set it all back up. Now, as we go through the gospel of John, you need to understand that this is John's perspective surrounding the life and events of a man named Jesus. This is why this book is so important to me and to us, because it is firsthand information of somebody who spent over three years of their life with Jesus, watching Him, interacting with Him, and being an intimate part of His life.

This John that we are talking about is the Apostle John. I know it can get confusing in Scripture. We're not talking about John the Baptist. We are talking about the Apostle John. He is the author. This is James's brother. And collectively, they were known as the Sons of Thunder, all right? This is the name that is given to them. So you kind of get a glimpse into their personality just by that name, the nickname, Sons of Thunder. This is the John who reclined with Jesus at the table during the Last Supper.

Some of you may know the picture, even if you didn't grow up in church of Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper, it looked nothing like that, okay? But this is the Last Supper. This is the John we're talking about. This is the John that Scripture said is the one Jesus loved. This is the John of whom Jesus says, "Take care of my mother." While he is hanging from the cross, he looks at John and tells him to take care of his mother.

This is the same John who outran Peter to the empty tomb. And so John has this close connection with Jesus. Again, firsthand information. If anyone knew Jesus, it was John. And that's why this book is so amazing for us. It is truly one of our closest connections with who Jesus truly is. I look at it as reliable history.

We have four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all of them written by different individuals at different times, all professing what they believe. John shares with us why he is writing his gospel. John is writing his gospel to share with anyone who would listen concerning his belief. He came to the conclusion in his life that Jesus is the Messiah. He believes Jesus is Lord, Jesus is God.

So much so that as He begins His gospel, He believes before there was anything else, there was God and there was the Word. But remember, He says the Word was God. It doesn't say the Word was a God, which is something totally different. No, the definite article is there. The Word was God. The word that is used there in Greek when John writes this is Logos. It is beyond just word.

It can mean even the unspoken word. It can mean the thoughts that are in your mind before you even speak them. It can mean reason. In Greek culture, Logos often meant reason. So when John writes at the beginning of his gospel, "In the beginning was the Word," John is saying, "In the beginning was reason." "In the beginning was thought." "In the beginning was wisdom, a Creator." "In the beginning was intelligence." This was not a random nor a chaotic act, but the world as we know it was created through order and control, not by chance, not by accident.

And some of you might say, "Well, how did John come to this conclusion? Why does John believe that God is Jesus, and through Him, He created everything?" Why did He believe this so deeply that John would dedicate the rest of his life to sharing this message, and even secular historians understand the life of John and know that He dedicated His life to share about Jesus? Why did He do that?

Well, the answer to that question is found in the pages of His book, John. So we're going to jump back in, and I will set up the setting for you. Again, John chapter 13:1. At this point in the story, Jesus is wrapping up His public ministry. Now, the disciples don't know this yet. Of course Jesus does, and we need to remember that when we are reading the story.

It's easy, especially for those of us that have grown up in the church to say, okay, we're obviously getting to the end of the book of John, we know that Jesus' death is coming, but understand His disciples didn't know that. They hadn't come to that conclusion, they hadn't figured that out yet. But really, what is going to happen here in this scene is the disciples are going to find out that the next 24 hours are going to change everything. The last nine chapters in the book of John are going to deal with these concluding moments.

And so John thought this was extremely important. At this point in the story, Jesus and His disciples are sitting in an upper room in Jerusalem, and they are getting ready to celebrate what would be famously known as the Last Supper. They are eating this meal together because all of the Jews that could have come to Jerusalem in order to celebrate and remember the Passover.

And just as a brief history lesson, the Passover was a celebration that the Jews had and still have to this day, remembering God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. Think of the story of Moses, that's what they're celebrating, as they would leave Egyptian bondage. The previous three years for John have offered many proofs as to who Jesus was, but what is going to happen in the next three days would cement the truth in John's mind that Jesus is Lord, and it also cements the truth for me as well.

So let me pray, and then we're going to jump back in where we left off, the upper room, as Jesus is speaking to His disciples in the early evening of Passover. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I am grateful for the words of John as He shares His experience with Jesus, firsthand experience, firsthand testimony. Lord, I know in my own personal life there are seasons, there are times, there are moments of doubt.

Wondering, can this whole thing really be true? Is this all just made up? But then we go back to the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and we see this firsthand experience to understand that our faith, our belief is not just based on nothing, but it has a foundational truth to it. And so may we be reminded and encouraged as we continue in the gospel of John.

We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. John chapter 13:1, John tells us it was just before the Passover festival, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. So Jesus knew that, but of course the disciples didn't. And having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.

So again, we have the setting. John is putting the story together. They have gathered in Jerusalem in order to celebrate this Passover meal. And so it would have been a busy time because anybody who was physically able, any Jewish person, was supposed to travel to Jerusalem in order to observe this religious holiday. It would have been a busy time. Think about what we just went through at the Christmas season, right? A religious holiday.

We're getting around everything we need to get, buying presents and getting together meals and family and all of the things that need to happen. The same is taking place in Jerusalem as they are ready to celebrate the Passover. Everybody is making preparations. Everybody is busy. It's a little hectic in the city because it's not made to support that many people. Now, this is not the first time that John has been in this situation. It's at least the third, if not the fourth, Passover that John has celebrated with Jesus.

And every time is a little different, but there's still certain traditions. And so he knows kind of what to expect going into this. But this year was already a little different when we get to this Passover, because things got pretty tense leading up to this final supper. For those of you that know the story, Jesus entered the city area a little early and he

went to the city of Bethany. And there the Scripture tells us that while he was in Bethany, he raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

That's a little abnormal, right? I mean, so things are a little different already. I mean, he raised this guy from the dead and everyone heard about it. Everyone knew about it. This was a little different. Now Jesus' ministry had been public for a while, but this was kind of like the grand opening of Jesus' ministry in their minds. Everybody had heard about this resurrection and nobody could deny it. Even the religious leaders couldn't deny what was happening, and the crowds were in favor of Jesus, and they were ready to crown Him king.

You remember what happened, right, on what we call Palm Sunday, as Jesus is riding on a donkey into the streets of Jerusalem, all of the people are proclaiming, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." They understand what is taking place, and they are ready to crown Him king. And so things already feel a little different.

In the minds of the disciples, it was the perfect time for the Messiah to be revealed and to begin his reign in Jerusalem, because remember, they were anticipating this new earthly kingdom. It's how they interpreted all of the Old Testament text, that these prophecies of a coming king, that this king that was going to be the son of David was going to rule over an earthly kingdom, and they could not wait for Jesus to begin His reign.

The new kingdom must be just around the corner. Again, they were excited. They were probably nervous and anxious. They were thrilled. And the Jewish people had been waiting for this moment for centuries. I imagine being John sitting in the upper room thinking that all of the difficulties that they have endured over the last three years were about to pay off. They were ready to ascend into positions of authority and power in this new kingdom that they thought Jesus was going to establish.

It should not be surprising to us that at this time, as we read in the Gospel of Luke about the same story, that the disciples on the way to Jerusalem were starting to argue over who would be the greatest in this new kingdom. Is that surprising, right? Here these guys are arguing who is going to be the greatest, who is going to take this most prominent position in Jesus' new kingdom. And in this moment, Jesus is about to give them a lesson in leadership they would never forget.

So we continue in verse 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, dot, dot, dot. So what's going to happen? Imagine you don't know the rest of the story, right? So Jesus knows that all power and authority has been given to Him. I think what verse 4 should say, I remember reading this for the first time and I think, oh, this is going to be really neat, right?

Jesus is going to do something powerful, awesome, and so I feel like it should read in verse 4, "Because Jesus knew everything was under His authority and He had all this power, He rose from the table and He was transfigured before them. He began to glow so bright that the disciples had to close their eyes and couldn't look straight at Him. He spoke and His voice was so loud that the entire house shook. Everyone within ten square miles knew something strange and miraculous was happening, but that's not what we read at all, is it?"

Instead, because Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power and that He had come from God and was returning to God, Luke tells us, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 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. I remember reading this the first time and thinking he did, what?

This is a little strange. I didn't even understand the idea of feet washing in that culture. And so, first, if you don't know the culture, let me just allow us to go back 2,000 years ago. In the first century in Judea, people walked around with open-toed shoes on dirt roads. They didn't have concrete roads like we did, especially in Judea there. And so, even after you took a shower, as soon as you would begin walking around town again, your feet would get dirty.

Now, as I was thinking about this picture in my head, is there anybody here who has ever camped at Otzigo State Park up in Otzigo, Michigan? I know my family has. Someone else, okay? So we used to camp up there every year, and anybody that's ever gone camping like that, you know, you bring your camper, your tent, or whatever, but there's a bathroom that has showers and restrooms in it. And so, after a long day at the beach or whatever else, you go to the shower, you take a shower, but the problem is, especially at Otzigo State Park, they have a lot of black dirt.

And so, as you're walking back to your campsite from the shower, you're walking along this black dirt path. And so by the time you get back to your campsite, your feet are filthy again. They're covered with dirt. It would have been very similar back in first century Judea, but even worse because not just humans were walking on that trail, but many of their animals were as well. Now, we live in Northeast Indiana, right? So we see Amish riding around, and if you've seen the Amish riding around, the horses leave little presents, right, for everybody.

And so, this is what would happen on the road. Not only were their feet covered with dirt, but it also was probably covered with some manure, some dried manure that was there. And so you could imagine how nasty and gross your feet would get, therefore, in that culture. It was very common for households to have a jar of water, a bowl, and a towel, a towel at the door, so that those that were entering the house could clean their feet before entering it.

So, the best way we can understand that in our culture today would be you take off your shoes when you go into somebody's house, so you don't track all of the dust and dirt and everything with you. I was taught that at a very young age. I always had to take off my shoes before I entered my house. So if I go to any of your houses, you will notice the first thing I will do is take off my shoes. This is essentially what they had to do, but when they took off their shoes, their feet would still be dirty, and so they would have to clean their feet.

And in most homes, especially those that were more wealthy, they would have a servant that would go to the door and would wash your feet for you so you didn't have to do it. The bowl would be there, the water, the towel would be there, and as you can imagine, that was a pretty nasty job, and so it was reserved for the lowest servant in the home. That one with the least seniority, right? You get to be the one that washes the gross feet of everybody that comes in. And so this should raise a question.

Now that we know that about the culture, if Jesus and His disciples had already sat down to eat, why were their feet still dirty? Have you ever thought about that? If they were already sitting down to eat, why were their feet still dirty? Why did they leave their shoes on? And the answer is because there wasn't a servant to do it, and none of the disciples were going to lower themselves to take on that task. Nobody wanted to do it.

They didn't even want to clean their own feet, let alone John's nasty feet, right? Besides, remember, Luke tells us, they were already arguing who was going to be the best and the greatest. And so maybe this was an opportunity for them to set up the pecking order of who was the least and who was the best. Now, can you imagine the shock and horror of the disciples when Jesus stands up and He prepares to go around the room and wash the disciples' feet one by one, everyone was thinking it, but Peter is the one who speaks what is on everyone's mind, and that's often the case as we know Peter.

So in John chapter 13, verses 6 through 8, John tells us that when he came to Simon Peter, he said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" And Jesus replied, "Peter, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. "No," said Peter. "You shall never wash my feet." And Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter knows in his heart this isn't right.

It definitely shouldn't be Jesus. I mean, if everybody in the room, Peter's probably thinking, okay, it probably shouldn't be me either. Maybe it should be James or, you know, maybe somebody else, but it definitely shouldn't be me. But if it's not me, it really shouldn't be Jesus. It's not what he expected. But as we see in the story, Peter is still focused on the kingdom of this world, while Jesus is trying to teach them and us that he was not here to establish a new earthly kingdom, he was here to establish a heavenly kingdom.

And the guidelines for a heavenly kingdom are very different from those of an earthly kingdom. And the disciples hadn't picked up on that yet, and we wouldn't have either if we were there. So John goes on in verse 9, "Then Lord," Simon Peter replied, "totally confused, having no idea what's going on, but if Jesus says I have to wash your feet or you can't have any part with me," Peter says, "Well, then why not? Let's just go the whole way. Not just my feet, Lord, but my hands and my head as well."

Can you hear how silly that is now?" This is what I love about Scripture. They don't hide their faults, they don't hide their mistakes. And Jesus answered, no, Peter, those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet. Their whole body is clean, and you are not clean, or you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that is why he said not everyone was clean. Now the disciples have to be very confused. What is he talking about?

I understand, we've taken showers, you got to clean my feet, but why do you have to clean my feet? Jesus knows that they are confused, and so he continues in order to help them understand what is going to take place. Verse 12, "When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and he returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked them, and he knew they didn't have an answer, right? This is one of those questions you ask, and you don't want the answer right away, so he goes on, "You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am.

Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly, I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Jesus establishes to the guys that are sitting around the room, yes, you call me teacher and Lord. I understand, and you are correct, that in this room, I am still the one that carries authority. I am still the one that has the power. I am still the one that makes the rules and makes the decisions. And so because of that, Jesus tells them, "I am rewriting the rules." I am going to rewrite the rules of authority and power and influence.

Again, remember, Luke's gospel tells us that a dispute had broke out amongst His disciples as to who was the greatest, and Jesus confirms to the disciples, "It's me. I'm the teacher, I am the Lord. I am still the most important person in the room. I still have the most authority. I still have the most power. I still have the most influence, and it's for that reason that I'm going to rewrite the rules for you. Jesus' followers were not to mimic the rules of those in the kingdom of this world.

God's kingdom has different rules, and Jesus was going to set an example for them of what living in His kingdom looked like. And so the question we have to ask ourselves today is, what kingdom are you living in? What rules are you following? Are you following the rules of this world, or are you following the rules of God's kingdom? Is it easy for you to wrestle with power and authority in this world?

Do you live most of your life by the rules of this world, or have you adapted your focus to the rules of God's kingdom? Do you look for ways to serve others, or does your world still revolve around you? So what does this mean? How did Jesus rewrite the rules? He was saying, "In my kingdom, things are different. The one with the most authority is not the one who is served, he is the one who does the serving." It's the exact opposite.

So what does this look like in our world? Well, it means for you and for me that my position at work and my position at home don't dictate how I treat others. No matter where I am at, I view the needs of others before my own. Do we do that perfectly? I don't, but we try. It means that my faith and my hope and my trust when I know I'm living in the kingdom of God means that those things, my hope and my trust and my faith are not in a bank account, because that doesn't really matter.

It means that my future thoughts go beyond the end of my life in this world, because if I'm part of God's kingdom, I understand that God's kingdom goes beyond my time here. And so my thoughts go beyond the end of this life. Does that mean that I don't get sad when we lose loved ones or when people are sick? No, of course that still happens. Of course I still miss them, but I have hope in something beyond that. Hope in something greater. It means that I store up my treasures in heaven and not at earth.

It means that I know there is something after this that is more important and is going to last a lot longer than my time here, so I don't waste all of my time worrying about the here and now. It means that I don't have as much stress, anxiety, or concern about the things of this world. Notice I said as much because we're still human, we still struggle with the things that we're going through, but I can honestly tell you because I know I am living in God's kingdom, this heavenly kingdom, that the things of this world don't carry nearly as much weight as they used to.

They're not nearly as important because I know there's more beyond this. It means that when I think about success in my own life, it's not measured by position or money or stuff. It means that when I'm living in this world, I do my best to love others, even those who are hard to love. And you all have people in your life that are hard to love.

It's not just loving those that are gracious and kind back to you, but it's those that are difficult, those that are hard, because you are part of God's heavenly kingdom, you recognize that that person is just as valuable as everybody

else, and so you do your best to love them. It means that you look for ways to bless others. You have this other-focused mind that others' needs come before your own.

It means that you and I recognize we are aliens in this world. This is not our home. Therefore, we live differently. You're going to live differently if this is not your permanent home. It means that you think differently, you behave differently, you act differently. Why? Because Jesus has changed everything. He has changed the rules. And so the question that we have to ask ourselves today is, have you allowed Jesus to wash your feet?

This is what he was talking about in the room, not your physical feet. Have you allowed Jesus to cleanse you, to transform you, to make you new? To make your heart new before God. Scripture says that if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. And of course, that's a verse I quote all the time, Romans 10:9, but it's easy to say with your mouth, but do you understand that when Paul is saying that, that if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, what does it mean if you proclaim somebody as your Lord?

It means that you're handing over control, right? It means that you're giving up authority and you're saying, I am now going to live for you. I'm going to live for your kingdom, not my own. It means that I no longer get to make the decisions. I'm going to follow the example that He has left for us. And then the faith component, that belief that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us from the dead, that this is not the end of the story. And so I put my hope and my faith in the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead.

One of the things I love about John and about studying His words about Jesus, whether it's because of my position or just because I enjoy talking with people about faith, but I love to explain to them that, yes, I have faith in Jesus, but you need to understand that over all of my research and all of my study, over my years of being alive, though I've looked at other religions and I love science and I love all of this stuff, that Jesus is actually the most logical conclusion as to the reason why we're here.

That Jesus truly is Lord. Everything was created through Him, that there was a Creator who made everything, who wants to have a relationship with us and loves us. It's the most logical conclusion because you only have two choices. Either there was nothing, there was nothing, there was nothing, and then boom, there is everything, or there was God, and He created everything. No matter what, you have to have a beginning.

And so all of us have faith in something, it's just something different. I choose to believe based on the testimony of those that have gone before me, based on the world I see around me, I've come to my own conclusion that Jesus is Lord, just like John. I hope that you would come to the same conclusion. Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, even after we come to the conclusion that Jesus is Lord, it doesn't mean we're perfect and it doesn't mean we get everything right.

We're still trying to learn what it looks like to be a part of this heavenly kingdom and not so concerned with the earthly kingdom, because we still live in the here and now. And so I pray that You would continue to teach us, that You would continue to guide us, and that we would do our best to follow the examples that Jesus left for us to the best of our ability, not because we can earn our salvation through them, but because we simply want to be obedient.

And so, Father, if there are individuals here today that are in a season, a moment of doubt in their lives as to whether or not this whole thing is true. Would you confirm through the gospel of John, through His testimony, through Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, the many others who had that firsthand experience and came to the conclusion, "Jesus is Lord," would you confirm that in our hearts and our minds as well?

That we would proclaim with our mouth, "You are our Lord, and we are putting our hope and our faith in the resurrection." And may we leave this place changed because of that. May we be different. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.