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Series: The Gospel of John
Message: A Basin and a Picture

Transcribed Message
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John 13:2-11

Well, over the years, both in the church and at the school, Bonnie has been involved in putting on a lot of children's musicals. As a result of that, I have had the privilege of hearing hundreds and hundreds of hours of songs being played in our home as she prepares weeks and months in advance. I've got a lot of those songs rattling around even at this point many years later. One of them comes from a musical, *Singspiration*, or Kids Praise 4. Kids Praise 4. Psalty is the singing songbook in this particular musical. And there's a song in there that I literally have heard run through my head a million times over the years. And the name of the song is Make Me a Servant. The lyrics simply say, if you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be a servant of all. And you think about those words. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be a servant of all. The reason they speak as powerfully as they do, and the reason they resonate the way they do is because they're reflective of the very words of Christ, aren't they? When He said that the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many. That is exactly what comes before us this morning in John 13.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to John 13. We are going to see in this passage this truth being acted out. It's almost like a dramatic illustration. It's like a parable that comes to life. And our big idea, I just took it from the song, right? You can't improve on it. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, learn to be a servant of all and do it by following the example of Jesus. So, we're in John 13, and you remember in our little review last Sunday, at the end of the 12th chapter, the nation has rejected Jesus. He turns from the nation, and He turns now to His disciples in the chapters that we're looking at here in 13 to 17 called the Upper Room Discourse or the Farewell Discourse. And it doesn't take very much to just look at what John is doing here and realize that these five chapters constitute about a fourth of His gospel. So, he takes about one-fourth of his entire gospel to talk to us about

what happens within a 24-hour period of time. And that's this amazing set of chapters that's before us.

So very, very quickly, let's review before we jump into these verses this morning. The time is given to us in verse 1, right? Now, 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. So, the time is now. The hour has come. This hour that He had spoken of so many times previous that was not yet there, now it's here. The time is here, and He is submitting Himself to it. He understands completely and fully the very mission for which He has come is this hour. And He understands that there is no glory without going through the cross. And that's exactly what He is indicating here in terms of His willingness to submit and do the Father's will.

The participants are the twelve disciples, this motley crew, if you will, right? This motley crew of men who have walked with Jesus now for some three years. And you don't get any hint in this passage, you don't get any hint that Jesus is at any point saying, Father, what was our plan B, by the way? What were we going to do if it didn't work out with these guys? Because there's not been a whole lot of encouragement just in terms of the things that have happened with these twelve. But He loved them, it says, and He loved them to the end. And we just noted how that speaks to the matter of security. It speaks to the reality of the endless, unconditional, pursuing love of God for us.

And then the purpose, of course, the time in the upper room could be summarized simply in saying Jesus is focused on disciple-making. Dr. Earl Radmacher and Dr. Erickson wrote a book on John 13 to 17. And you know what they entitled it? *The Disciple Maker*. What Jesus does in this upper room, and in part what He's been doing all along, of course, is He's preparing His disciples for the time when He's not going to be there. His hour has come. He's going to physically leave them, and then they are going to carry on this mission that He has entrusted to them. So that's what's happening by way of background.

Let's look at what can only be described as a simply remarkable event. Those words don't even come close to capturing what we look at in this passage. It's not just that this is a remarkable event. In many ways, this is an incomprehensible event. In many ways, this is

an absolutely shocking event. We're going to have to adjust our cultural realities to try to gain some understanding of what happens in this passage, but it is remarkable. It is beyond our comprehension in many ways to realize just the nature of what's going on here.

But the setting, of course, is the cross. And the cross is casting its shadow over everything that happens in this upper room discourse. That's the focal point. That's what's coming. That's what's being anticipated. So, we are now, remember, on Thursday evening. This is Maundy Thursday. So, we're 24 hours from Jesus dying on the cross. Within 24 hours, Jesus will have died on the cross. His body will have been placed in the tomb, and these 12 men will have scattered to the far corners. And so, that gives us some sense.

But for now, the disciples, notice first of all, are focused on thrones, and they're not focused on towels. Now, you say, how do you know that? Well, I don't know it from John, but we know it from the gospel of Mark, and we know it from the gospel of Luke, who tell us that as this evening is being anticipated, and as they're making their way to this upper room where they're going to gather with Jesus, these guys are arguing among themselves as to who among them is the greatest. I mean, what an amazing conversation to be unfolding on this night, of all nights, for that to be happening. Hard to imagine that anybody is going to be thinking at all about washing feet when they're arguing among themselves about who among them really is number one among the disciples of Jesus. Anybody who would venture towards the basin and the towel and the water in this evening would automatically disqualify himself, according to no doubt, what they were talking about from any conversation about being the greatest, right? So, this is the background to this.

Notice in verse two, Judas is focused completely on himself, not on others. Verse two says, during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. Now, this is just like a parenthetical statement. We're going into this story, and it's almost like John says, now wait a minute, I need to bracket this verse two, I need to put a parentheses around it. He's basically telling us, and we're going to deal with the whole Judas storyline, Lord willing, in a future study, but it's a reminder, and I think this is why John puts it here. Why would John interject this at this point in the story? He would do it for this most important reason, because he wants us to understand

that what is unfolding in this hour and in this 24 hours, and literally in all of our lives every day, is a picture and a reminder of the cosmic battle that is going on every day of our life. It's a reminder that there is a spiritual warfare that's going on in all our lives every day. When Paul says in Ephesians 6 that you don't wrestle against flesh and blood, he meant that. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood. We wrestle against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. There's a spiritual cosmic battle going on every day, and we face it every day in various ways. And the whole point I think that John would make, and certainly the point that Paul makes, is if we lose focus and our eyes become focused on people who we think are the problem, then we're missing it. And that's what I think John is going to want us to see here. Judas wants a conquering king. He does not want a foot-washing Savior, and so his heart is hard, and it is against Christ.

Then notice thirdly, Jesus is focused on truth. Verse 3, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God. Truth. Truth just has a wonderful way of keeping us grounded. Truth has a wonderful way of keeping us centered, and that's what we love about it, isn't it? Verse 3 is very similar to verse 1, right? Knowing the Father had given all things into His hand. Verse 1, this hour that has come, and the Father is bringing all of this about, so both verses speak to that. And the focus, of course, in Jesus' mind and in His heart, is on doing and accomplishing the Father's will. He fully understands His identity. He knows exactly why He has come. There isn't any misconception on His part. He is looking to the future glory that comes only by way of the cross. It's what the writer of Hebrews says in the 12th chapter, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the what? The joy. Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of God.

That's exactly what's happening here, and that's what truth does in our life. Truth anchors us to something that is solid, that's going to ground our life, that's going to give us a sense of hope and purpose during the hardest things that come. And the reality is that speaks to the importance of getting the Word of God into your life every day. Every day that you go apart from the Word of God, as Peter says, which is the very milk and the

sustenance of our spiritual life, the easier it is for us to lose our perspective and to lose our way. And so, here Jesus models that beautifully for us. He's centered on the truth.

All of this background makes what happens next so remarkable. So, let's look at this matter of foot washing. In verses 3 through 5, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things at His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

Now, before we jump into the outline, there are denominations and there are traditions who practice foot washing. Some traditions practice foot washing once a year, usually on Maundy Thursday. Usually on Thursday of Passion Week, they will have a foot washing service. Other denominations and other traditions have a foot washing service weekly, like we do communion. Most of them do it in the evening, and the crowd is much smaller. But there is a tradition several of them that do regular weekly foot washing. So, we have at Covenant two ordinances that we observe, baptism and communion and the Lord's Supper. Some people add a third one to that, and they believe there are three ordinances that the church should regularly be practicing.

Now, here's why I would think that that's not what's happening in this passage, and we'll probably speak to this more as well next week. There are three things that you see in Scripture that bring together our understanding of what is an ordinance or a sacrament that we practice on a regular basis. It is something like in the instance of baptism and the Lord's Supper. It's something that is commanded by Christ. So, it's commanded by Christ. Secondly, it's something that is practiced in the book of Acts. You see it happening in the book of Acts. And then when you get into the epistles, it's explained. So, you have those three things at work. You certainly have it with baptism, and you have it with the Lord's Supper. Jesus commands that. We see it in the book of Acts being practiced in the life of the early church, and then you see it explained in the epistles.

Well, we don't have that with foot washing. You can argue you have the first one. There is a command of Christ. I think we will hopefully understand what exactly is

happening in that regard, but we don't have any indication. Foot washing is never mentioned in the book of Acts, which would be striking if in fact it's an ordinance that the church is to practice regularly. How in the world would it be that the early church never had it mentioned one time in the book of Acts? And it's only mentioned one time in the epistles and without reference to an explanation. So, I would simply say to you what we have here is a dramatic illustration. This is like a living parable. It shows to us the character and the life and the ministry of Christ and what it is that he has come to do and obviously what he wants us to do. He wants us to turn from self and selfishness, and he wants us to turn to serving others. I think that's what we want to take away from this.

So, let's begin by just noting that this is a very common occurrence in the first century in biblical times. Foot washing was an absolute necessity. Our whole world of hygiene and health and all of that is obviously very different than biblical times. And so, you absolutely had this as a necessity. I think the very first occurrence or reference to foot washing in the Bible is in Genesis 18. Remember, Abraham is sitting under the oaks of Mamre and three men come towards him. He doesn't know it at the time. Two of them are angels. One of them is the pre-incarnate Christ. And what does he do? He gets up, he's hospitable, he welcomes them, and what does he say? Let me get some water so you can wash your feet. He doesn't say he's going to wash them. He probably would have a servant wash them. But that's the first time in the Bible we have a reference to foot washing.

We have one in a kind of way in John chapter 1. Remember John chapter 1 when we're reading about John the Baptist and he's talking about Christ and he's talking about the fact that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. Then John says, I am not worthy to reach out and even untie his sandal, let alone wash his feet. John the Baptist says, I'm not even worthy to untie his sandal. I'm certainly not worthy to even wash his feet. So, we do have that little bit of background regarding this matter of foot washing.

Well, what we have here in verses 3, 4, and 5, as I said, is a common occurrence. It's an absolute necessity. You went over to somebody's house. You've just walked in dusty, dirty streets. You've got open shoes, sandals, and your feet need to be washed. And so, the first thing that a guest would do when you came into their home is they would have

a servant wash your feet. It was a matter of honor. It was a matter of hospitality. It was just the most common thing that would happen. And it wasn't just any servant that would do it. It was unfortunately for the guy on the lowest end of the totem pole. He was the one. A Jewish servant was not even to wash feet. It was for Gentiles. And so, the lowest of the servants would wash the feet of those who came.

So, verse 4, right? Everyone is focused on food, on eating, fellowship, maybe a side conversation or two about who's still the greatest. That's still probably going on. That's the setting. That's what's going on. We're told Jesus gets up from this area. It's not a table. It's not Da Vinci's table. I'm sorry. They didn't all look at the camera and say cheese. They're sitting on the floor with probably a small food area in front of them, leaning on their elbow. Their feet are away from the table. Jesus gets up from the table. No big deal. Probably somebody else got up before that.

What happens next is a problem. Jesus makes His way over to the door where the water basin and towel are. And we read in that fourth verse He rose from supper. He laid aside His outer garments. Now, let's just bring that into our world, all right? Jesus takes off His outer garments. That means in today's language, He took off His suit coat, whatever that is. I don't know. What is a suit? No. He took off His tie. I don't see any ties out here. No. He took off His tie. He took off His shirt. He took off His trousers. His outer garments are off. He takes this towel, which is to be understood as a fairly long towel, and He wraps it around His waist. It's long enough to not only be around His waist, but to be used as a towel for wiping feet. And He begins to make His way around the room, around the table, and He's washing the feet of His disciples. He's on the floor. He's kneeling. He's at their feet – stinky, smelly feet – taking off their sandals, washing their feet. Now, nobody's talking. Nobody's eating. Nobody's making any comments about who's the greatest anymore. They're speechless. They're shocked. This goes so against any decorum, any kind of correction in terms of how it is that they would have ever seen something like this happen. I think the fact that Jesus waits to this point in the evening just builds the drama because He gave this room of 12 men every opportunity to have gotten up and gone over and taken this role on themselves, and not one of them did it.

Now, just push pause for a moment in the story. And as you look at your outline, there's been a lot of commentators that have drawn the correlation between John 13 and Philippians 2, and I think it's a beautiful picture. So, let me just walk you through these five things that relate between these two passages. Jesus rose from supper. We know that He rose from the throne of heaven to begin this journey of what we call the incarnation, right, to become the God-man. He laid aside His garments, John said. He emptied Himself. He didn't empty Himself of His attributes. He didn't empty Himself of His deity. He emptied Himself of the divine prerogative to control those things, and He submitted fully and completely to the Father. He took a towel. Paul says He took the form of a servant. John says He poured water. Paul says He poured out His life. John says He resumed His place after He had washed their feet. Paul says God highly exalted Him.

In this amazing, amazing picture of what we have here, at this most critical time in the life and ministry of our Lord with these twelve men, He takes the vestiges of a servant. He takes the basin, and He takes the towel, and He kneels at the feet of each of these men, and He washes their feet. They had seen Jesus touch unclean people in healing them. They had seen Jesus reach out and touch a leper. That leper had no control over his life circumstance. This is Jesus taking on Himself the role of a servant and moving towards men who are willfully, purposefully, selfishly focused on themselves, consumed with pride and ambition. He came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

Look at the confused follower. As we pick up the story again in verses 6 and 7, it's a question and an answer. All right, verse 6, He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand. Now, John queues it all up for us, doesn't he? Do you see how John queues it up? Beginning of verse 6, he queues it up when he says what? He queues it up for us when he says, He came to Simon Peter.

And because we know the gospel storyline, we know we're in for some fun right at this point, right? We're in for some excitement. Something's going to happen because John tells us he came to Peter. We don't know when in the cycle around the room this happened. We don't know if it was, you know, second guy, third guy, fifth guy, if it was the

last guy, but we know when he comes to Peter, something's going to happen. And could it be, is it possible that in Peter's mind he's thinking this is a test? This is a test. Jesus isn't supposed to wash our feet. He's the son of God. He's the Messiah. He's the anointed one. What we're supposed to do is we're supposed to protest. What we're supposed to do is say, no, no, you don't wash my feet. Maybe Peter's thinking from that vantage point.

And so, he calls out this protest. He literally says, you, my. If you just translate this literally, it says, you, my feet washed. So, the Holy Spirit just puts these two words right next to each other, you and my. And it's almost like Peter says, what do you think you're doing trying to wash my feet? Peter is humble enough to not want Jesus to wash his feet, but he's proud enough to think somehow he can tell Jesus what to do.

And so, the Lord's gracious response. Look at this response again in verse 7. Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand. What a sweet response that is on the part of our Lord. You'll understand it later. Isn't that what life is so often like? You'll understand it later. We don't always understand what's happening to us at the point at which these events and circumstances unfold. But it's like Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, right? Now I know in part, but then I will know fully even as I am known.

Well, we might have hoped that that would have caused Peter to say, oh, okay, I'm going to understand this later. But look at now, secondly, there's a rejection and a rebuke in verse 8. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you have no part, you have no share with me. So, Jesus says, Peter, you're not going to understand this now, you'll understand it later. You hope he says, okay, I'll leave it there, but not Peter, right? He comes back with a double negative. Now, we would love for John to have thrown in a *me genoita* right here, right? We would have loved for him to pull a Pauline *me genoita*, may it never be, but he doesn't do that. But he does use a double negative, right? He says, never shall you wash my feet, not never. Not good grammar, but he's making his point, no way, no how, not here, not there, not anywhere, to do a little Dr. Seuss, right? He's not going to do it. You can't do it. You can't wash my feet.

It takes us right back to Matthew 16. Remember, in Matthew 16, these same men, same Peter, Jesus is explaining to them that he's going to die. And remember, Peter pulls him aside and says, Lord, all this negative talk about the cross and your death, it's discouraging us. It's kind of a downer. Don't talk about stuff like that. And remember what Jesus has to say. Jesus has to rebuke him and tell him, Peter, you're expressing the ideas of Satan himself. And so, you almost have that same thing play out here. Jesus' response cuts to the heart of the matter, and we realize that what's going on in this physical foot washing is a lot more than just physical foot washing. There's a deeply theological, deeply spiritual reality that Jesus wants us to see.

In the physical act of washing their feet, Jesus is wanting to teach them two things. He wants to teach them, and he gives us a picture. So, we have the basin, and we have a picture, right? It's a picture of our relationship with him and our fellowship with him. Two different things. Our relationship with him has to do with our justification, our salvation. Our fellowship with him, our communion with him has simply to do with that. It has to do with our sanctification.

And so, Jesus responds to Peter, as Peter comes back, overreacting now, right? Peter goes into overdrive and notice his overreaction in verses 9 through 11. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. The whole thing, Lord, just throw the bucket on me. I need a full, complete bath. 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. When Peter hears the Lord say at the end of verse 8, if I do not wash you, you have no part with me. Whoa! Peter heard that, and he was like, no, no. That's not what I want to have happen. I want to be with you. I don't want that outcome. And so, he speaks to that, and we have this heartfelt response that shows us his desire to be in this relationship, and fellowship, and communion with Christ.

It's very much like what you have in John 6. Remember when John records back in the sixth chapter that Jesus taught some hard things, and a whole bunch of disciples, followers, left him, remember? And Jesus turned to these 12 again, and he said to them, are you also going to leave me? And what did Peter say? Oh Lord, we would never leave

you. You alone have words of eternal life. Who would we go to? To whom would we go? You alone have words of eternal life. That's what he's saying basically here.

In his response, look what Jesus does. He makes this clarification. There are two different words for bath here. It's given to us in that way in the English, but he says, Jesus said to him, the one who has bathed, that's a complete bath. That's a full washing, right? He does not need to wash except for his feet. So, we have a bath, and we have the idea of just washing feet. So, if you've experienced the bath, then all you need is to have your feet washed. You don't need to experience the bath again.

So, what's going on? This is the spiritual reality that Jesus is teaching, justification and sanctification. To be completely bathed is a picture of salvation. That happens one time. You don't need to get saved over and over again. You misunderstand the whole doctrine of salvation if you think that in this experience in which you believe in God gives you eternal life, that there is a way in which that is forfeited, and then you need to go back and get saved all over again. No. Jesus makes it abundantly clear. If you have washed, you have been bathed, you have been saved. You have eternal life. You don't need a bath, Peter.

You need your feet washed because we live in a dirty, sinful world. And while we don't need to be saved over and over again, we do need to be cleansed over and over again. And so, we're called to live a sin-confessing life. If we confess our sin, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sin, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We're saved once, never to be repeated, but we live in a dirty world, and we need to be cleansed daily.

Verse 11 makes a reference to Judas, for he knew who was to betray him. That was why he said, not all of you are clean. We'll pick that up in the future. Jesus demonstrates this amazing heart of humility. He just puts before us the truth that we spoke of earlier. If you want to be great in God's kingdom, you need to be a servant of all. You need to follow the example of our Lord.

So, what do we take away? My friends, it's simply this. The gospel of grace always eliminates pride. It demands that we see that we have nothing to offer, and then it offers us everything that we need. One of the most remarkable things about the gospel of the grace

of God, the gospel of the grace of God, is it brings us down to our lowest point, to the point where we realize that all human pride has to go, that God doesn't want anything from us. He's not looking for self-effort from us. He's looking for us simply to believe that what Jesus did when that hour came was enough. That's all that needed to be done. He's not keeping track of how many times you go to church. He's not keeping track of how nice you are to your neighbor, not in the sense of ever attaining salvation for those things. Obviously, all good works are to be considered worthy of worship of our Lord. But we don't do those things to gain eternal life. Jesus said you just take one bath, one time, believe that what Jesus did is enough, and you receive the gift of eternal life. You receive the forgiveness of sin. Matt Papa said it this way, if the gospel has never broken you, you have never really heard it. That's what the gospel does, doesn't it? It takes us to our lowest point where we realize all we have is what Jesus did on the cross for our salvation.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank You for this amazing demonstration on the part of our Lord towards His disciples and then just giving us this beautiful picture that He calls us to follow and do likewise. So, Father, we pray that Your Spirit would impress these truths upon our lives and the life of our church, our families, our marriages. We pray that all our relationships, Father, might be reflective of this heart and this desire. And Father, I pray if there's someone listening this morning who's never put their faith in Jesus as their Savior, trusting in Him alone, that You would cause them to see that there's nothing that You want from them other than to believe, to trust, to place their faith and confidence in what Jesus did for each one of us. Father, do that good work. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.