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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: The Gospel of John
Message: Go Low

Transcribed Message
September 6, 2026
John 13:12-17

Scotty Scheffler is a name that many of you might be familiar with. He's the number one golfer in the world. Just last weekend, he won the Tour Championship, the final championship of the year, and won \$10 million in doing that. Almost certainly, he's going to be named the 2026 golfer of the year. He's a guy I pull for. Every time he's in a tournament, I'm hoping that Scotty wins. Now, a lot of people say that's because my game and his seem familiar. They seem similar. Well, maybe you don't think so. But no, there really is no comparison, obviously. But I do like the fact that this is a guy who is bold in his witness for Christ. His testimony of Jesus as his Savior, he just puts it out there every chance he gets or whenever he's asked. In fact, he says that as much as he loves playing golf, his number one reason for being out there on the golf course is to glorify God. And so it's just kind of a cool testimony of a guy who's literally at the top of his game and yet understands the real purpose of life.

It was a guy named Todd Lewis, who's a golf analyst for the Golf Channel, who was asked this last week about Scotty Scheffler and what makes him unique. And what Todd Lewis said was, in a day and time when so many athletes and so many celebrities are just self-consumed and all they think about is themselves, he said, Scotty Scheffler is just a unique guy in that, and these were Todd's words. I didn't write them down, but it's the paraphrase of him. He said, the guy looks to serve other people. It's like he's a servant. And I thought, that's my opening story for next week, because that really is where we are in John 13.

So, let's turn again to this wonderful passage in John 13, and we'll look at verses 12 through 17 this morning. And as we do that, our big idea is that in the eyes of Jesus, true spirituality, true Christlikeness, is about emptying oneself. It's a turning away from this

perspective that it's all about me, it's all about self, and you choose to serve others. So, let's do a quick review.

Those of you that were here will remember these things. Those of you that were not will get caught up for the opening 11 verses of John 13, because these verses describe three things to us. They describe, first of all, an unforgettable night, an unforgettable night. And of course, it's an unforgettable night for a lot of different reasons, not the least of which, this is literally the last night that Jesus spends with his disciples before the cross. The cross is, again, just literally hours away, and this is the way Jesus is choosing to spend this last night. It makes it an unforgettable night, that he would choose to be engaged with these men on this last night in this way.

It's just remarkable. It reflects what we saw in verse 1, and in verse 3, his heart, his desire, is to do the will of the Father. That's his sole motivation. He wants to accomplish and do the Father's will for his life. Now, it doesn't take a whole lot to realize that's supposed to be our motivation, isn't it? Our sole desire in life should be, God, we want to glorify you, and we want to live life every day in a way that honors and pleases you. And that certainly was true of Jesus.

I don't know where the words bucket list started. I don't know when that started, you know, the idea of having a bucket list of things that that you look forward to doing. And I don't have any problems with a bucket list. But here would be my concern, my caution. If we get to a point in our life where our bucket list is all we want to think about, all we want to focus on, all we look forward to, I think we learn from Jesus. That's not enough. That's not what life is about. And I would just simply say, you could take the most amazing bucket list, and whatever you have on that list is going to so pale in comparison to what awaits us on the other side. That's really what Jesus is saying to us here. Get ready for what's on the other side. This unforgettable night that he spends, he just pours out his heart to his disciples. They get to see their Lord yet again in that way.

Secondly, it's an unforgettable act, isn't it? This unforgettable act. It's so hard, as we said last week, I think for us to fully appreciate the shock in that room when Jesus gets up from the table and goes over and gets the towel in the basin, takes the vestiges of a servant

and begins to wash the feet of these men. I just don't know that we can jump across that cultural divide and fully appreciate just how shocking it was for them to see this and then to experience it. Because I know this, if the elders announced that we were going to have a foot washing service tonight, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands about who's coming back, but I think if we announced a foot washing service tonight, and I'm coming, you know what I'm doing this afternoon, evening? I'm washing my feet. I'm putting on a pair of clean socks, maybe putting a little perfume powder in the shoes. I'm getting ready to have my feet washed.

That's not what happened here. Jesus is kneeling on the floor before these men, and he's washing dirty, smelly feet. The feet of men who were moments before arguing about which of them is the greatest in all of the kingdom. It just obviously stretches credulity, but that's what they were doing.

And then it's finally an unforgettable impact. So it's an unforgettable night. It's an unforgettable act. It's an unforgettable impact on the lives of these 12 men. We know that because Peter is at the center of the story, as you remember, and Peter, 30 years later, when he writes the letter to the churches in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5, what does he say? Likewise, you that are younger submit to your elders. And then he says, clothe yourself with humility. Because God is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble.

Now, here's the cool thing, and this just shows the inspiration of Scripture. Because here's Peter, 30 years before making all of this commotion, about having his feet washed. Now, here he is, 30 years later, a changed man, a much more mature man in Christ. Peter is now reflecting this heart of a servant. And the word that he uses for clothe is the word that speaks of a servant taking on the garments of a servant. And he got it, didn't he? Jesus gets up, takes off his outer garments, puts on the clothing of a servant. 30 years later, it's like Peter relives this experience. And he says, yeah, you that are younger submit to those who are your elders. Clothe yourself, take the garments of a servant. Because God resists the proud and he gives grace to the humble.

So what is the attitude of a foot washer? Let's look at that this morning. Let's look at the attitude of a foot washer. We're going to see three different things that Jesus teaches us here. The first one is simply this matter of example in verse 12. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, do you understand what I have done to you? So just a very quick review again of this picture that's a dramatic illustration. That's what's happening in John 13. It's a dramatic illustration. It's a living parable that Jesus is acting out. What does the foot washer look like? What is the attitude of a foot washer? That's the story that's presented to us here. And remember those two important things that we noted from verse 10? When you look back there at verse 10, remember Jesus said to them, 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.

Remember we have those two different words for two different kinds of washing. We have the word that's translated bathed, and that is a picture of regeneration. That's a picture of salvation. It lasts forever. It comes on the basis of belief and trust. The verb form there, when Jesus says, if you have been bathed, is this idea of a perfect passive. Now that's important simply to say to us the perfect tense speaks of something that happened in the past, but it carries on in its impact into the future. So, when you trusted Jesus as your Savior, it likely happened sometime in the past, and its impact continues, doesn't it?

But it's in the passive voice, which is the voice of grace, which means that it's something that was acted upon you from outside of yourself. Yes, you believed, but God is the one who accomplished that work of regeneration. That's why he can say to Peter, you've been bathed. You don't need a bath, Peter. You don't need me to dump this whole bucket of water on you like you've asked me to, but you do need to wash your feet. That's a picture, remember, we said of fellowship, of communion, and likely we need that every day. We need that multiple times a day because we live in this fallen world, and we yield to temptation and sin, and we need to have our feet washed in that sense of restoring communion. So, we have this beautiful picture.

Both of them are based on the cross. Both of them are based on what Jesus is looking towards in this last night. He came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a

ransom for many. I simply say to you this, this foot-washing experience, this example is a living, dramatic, living parable of the life and ministry of Jesus. That's what Jesus was. Jesus was a foot washer. He was a servant, wasn't he? But it's more than the obvious.

You notice that secondly. It's more, there's more in the mind here than just the obvious. Look again at what we see in Jesus's last comment there at the end of verse 12. He says, do you understand what I have done to you? Does that seem strange? Does that seem strange? Jesus has washed their feet. Does it seem strange that in this next interaction over these events, he would put forward this question that seems so basic, so obvious. Do you know what I have done to you? Well, of course we know what you've done to us. You've washed our feet. But there's more to that question than just the obvious. Do you know I have washed your feet? When he asked that question, John gives us no indication that anybody answered it. Nobody was going to say anything now, right? I mean, they've seen Peter go through what he did, you know, pour the bucket of water on me. No, Peter, we don't need to do that. And that whole scenario played out and they're already in shock. When Jesus says, do you know what I have done to you? I mean, there's not one of them that's going to say anything because they just don't want to venture into that.

I think in answer to that question, do you know what I have done to you? Obviously, they could say, yes, you have washed our feet and they would have been right. But what they really have to say is we probably don't know. There's more here, isn't there, Lord? You're pressing into something else. If you mean, do we understand fully the purpose for which you have done this? No, we don't. That's what they would have had to have said. We know that because of the way Peter responded. He missed it completely. Jesus is foot washing.

I don't have any sense of, those who are of the tradition of foot washing, I don't have anything negative to say about those who practice that tradition, other than I don't think Jesus is instituting a third ordinance here. If churches practice that, that's fine. But I don't think it's one that you can go to scripture and say, this is now the third ordinance for the church. We talked about the fact that it isn't even mentioned in the book of Acts. It's mentioned one time in First Timothy, chapter five and verse ten. And there, Paul is

commending a widow for her hospitality and the fact that when people come to her home, she washes their feet. It's the example that Jesus is putting forward here, the importance of being a servant. That's what he wants them, of course, to take away. Greatness in God's kingdom means you learn to be a servant of all. Instead of the question being asked, me, a foot washer? Are you kidding me? Me, a servant? You talking to me? You want me to be a servant? You want me to be a foot washer? The question should be, what do you want to be in life? What do you want to be known for? And the answer should be, I want to be a foot washer. I want to be known for being a foot washer. Yeah, that's exactly what Jesus is driving at here.

Look at that secondly, at his command in verses 13 through 16. You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should also do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. So, we look at this command, it's stated for us there, isn't it? And in stating this command, Jesus gives us a principle. The principle that he gives us is simply the principle of greater to the lesser, greater to the lesser.

He illustrates it in three ways, doesn't he? There's the teacher and the student. There's the master and the servant. There's the sender and the one who is sent. So, when you look at those three things that Jesus puts forward there to illustrate this principle of greater to lesser, teacher to student, master to servant, the one sending and the one sent, there's clearly a social order in each one of those illustrations, isn't there? There's protocol. There's an understanding of how these relationships are to function. Teachers to students, masters to servant. Somebody's sending somebody and the sent one is acting on their behalf.

What does human nature do at that point? What does our human pride say? Our human nature and pride says, we don't want to serve people who are under us, whoever they might be. That's not the way our mind works. That's not the way our mind functions. We're in charge. We're the boss. We're over people. Whatever that social construct might

be, that's what Jesus is putting forward here. And He's basically challenging that, isn't He? Jesus wipes out that social order. Jesus puts this room in shock by doing what He did. He did literally the unthinkable. And now He's saying to these men, there's no excuse for any of you not to have the attitude of a foot washer. They have an obligation because their Lord, their Savior is greater than all, and He willingly submitted Himself to this role of a servant.

Again, the point I don't think is to institute foot washing. The point is the spiritual truth of learning to be a foot washer. What does that look like? What does that mean in terms of our commitments to each other? Well, I think Jesus gives us a picture of it when He tells us something of a model for ministry. I think in this whole illustration, there's a model for ministry here for us. It cuts across the thinking of our world, doesn't it? It cuts across the grain of our culture to think of ourselves as foot washers, to think of people who are below us in terms of the social order and whatever that might entail in terms of work or home or play or sports or whatever that is. There are certain expectations, aren't there? The world acts in a certain way. When the way the world acts is the way the church acts, that's where there's a problem, right?

Before we jump into the outline, just notice again verse 14 when Jesus says, if I then your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. Do you notice what Jesus didn't say there? When you read that, what do you expect Jesus is going to say? I have washed your feet, now you, what? Yeah, now you wash mine. That's what you would expect him to say. I'm sure every guy in the room, when that sentence started to be formed, Jesus is going to tell us, get over here and wash my feet. But he didn't tell him that, did he? He didn't say, come and wash my feet. What do you suppose would have happened if he had said, now I have washed your feet, now you wash mine? What do you think would have happened? They would have had another argument and they had another fight, wouldn't they? About who gets to wash Jesus' feet. There'd be all kinds of pushing and shoving, getting over to the towel of the basin now, because they have an opportunity to wash Jesus' feet, which would be an incredible privilege.

But that's not what he tells them. He doesn't tell them to step into this place of privilege. He tells them to step into this place of being a servant. He tells them to wash

each other's feet. So now, rather than simply stating the obvious, he tells them that this is what they need to do. I have given you an example. And as an example, there's only two places in all of the New Testament where that kind of language is put forward where we're to follow the example of Jesus. Now, granted, we follow the example of Jesus in everything, but there are two places in which the Holy Spirit uses this language. He uses it in 1 Peter chapter 2 to tell us that we're to follow the example of Jesus in suffering. And then he uses it here in John 13:15 to speak of the example of being a servant. So, we follow Jesus' example in these two things.

And what that says to us is this. First of all, it says, knowing is not enough. Knowing is not enough, right? You have to do it. You have to do it. The Pharisees were great at knowing stuff, weren't they? They knew everything. They just didn't do it. They were satisfied with just having this head knowledge and all of that, but they never acted on it. So, it's not enough to study it. It's not enough to discuss it. It's not enough to hear it. We have to do it. Jesus had the slogan, just do it, before Phil Knight and Nike ever thought of it. Maybe they got it from Jesus, who knows?

The second thing is there's action and there's attitude, right? There is action and attitude. They're both key. You can serve each other and have a terrible attitude all the while you're doing it. That's not going to count, right? That's not going to count. Yeah, there has to be action. Knowing isn't enough, but there also has to be the right attitude. You can't go to wash somebody's feet and say, oh, I didn't know that water was 120 degrees Fahrenheit. I didn't know that was going to burn your feet. And you can't go, oh, are those ice cubes floating around in that water? Did I want to wash your feet? No. Jesus is putting them together. You have to know it. You have to do it, but you have to do it in the right heart, the right attitude, the true heart and true attitude of a foot washer.

Now, look at how this example gets applied. It's applied in the New Testament. First of all, in the area of leadership, right? Here are the disciples. Again, they're arguing about who's the greatest among them. Jesus turns it upside down. And in Mark's gospel and the 10th chapter, saying to these same men, Jesus called them to him and said to them, you know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their great

ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. That's exactly the point that Jesus is making it here. You know that we have missed it when in the culture of the church we actually have the two words celebrity and pastor together, right? You know we have totally missed the heart of Jesus when we actually have pastors who are known as celebrity pastors. It's an oxymoron. We have foot-washing pastors. We have servant pastors, right? That's the leadership call. The measure of success in the church can never be the measure of success in the world, and I fear that's where we have gotten. We've gotten to the place where we look at how we're doing as a church, and the template that we put over it is the template of the world, and Jesus brings us a totally different perspective.

The second thing I see here is in our attitudes towards one another. So, yes, leadership should certainly embody this, but it's all of us. It's all of us that are to be serving in this way. In Galatians chapter 5 verse 13, for you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. That's life in the Spirit. That's what he's talking about, right?

What would happen if we related to each other in this way? Constantly having an attitude of a foot washer. The writer of Hebrews puts it like this, provoke one another. It's my favorite verse in the Bible. Provoke one another, but you've got to provoke one another in the right way, right? You've got to provoke one another to love and good deeds, to love and good works. That's the point. So, for that to happen, three things, right?

If our attitude towards one another is going to be the attitude of a foot washer, what's going to have to happen? I think three things. First, we have to be personally involved. We have to be personally involved. You can't serve each other in absentia, can you? You have to be engaged with each other. You can't serve each other at arm's length. To wash feet, you have to be involved. You have to be in community. You have to be

connected to each other. Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the manner of some, but so much the more as you see the day approaching, that same writer of Hebrews says, doesn't he? So, we have to be personally involved, and there's all kinds of ways to do that.

Just last week in our new members class, we had a brief discussion about what does it look like to serve. The consensus basically was in seasons of life, and we all have seasons of life, and so we don't put some legalistic thing on everybody in the same way, but there's all kinds of ways to serve each other. All you have to do week to week is look at the newsletter, look at the bulletin, listen to announcements, and there's almost always something said about how you can serve somebody. It might be as simple as getting here early and greeting somebody that you don't know in the foyer, making them feel welcome, making them feel more at home. There's a hundred ways we can do that, but every one of them requires personal engagement on some level, some kind of commitment to community and involvement.

Secondly, we have to see people the way Christ does. We have to see people the way Christ does. How did Jesus see people? How did He see His disciples? Well, He looked at them through the eyes of a servant. He looked at them through the eyes of a foot washer. He was looking to serve and to meet needs. He wasn't looking for somebody to serve Him and somebody to meet His needs. He didn't even ask them to wash His feet, and yet that's where we too often find ourselves.

Thirdly, when we serve others, we serve Christ. So that's just the beauty of this, isn't it? For as much as you have done it, Jesus said, unto the least of these you've done it unto me. We serve with the idea that even as we serve others, we serve Christ.

Now look at verse 17, and Christ promised. This is what wraps it all up. If you know these things, He says, blessed are you if you do them. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Three things. One of them stayed. The other two just flow out of it. The first one is you're going to experience happiness. That's what the word blessed here is. It's just the word for happiness. Happy is the man, Psalm 1, right? All of the beatitudes. Here's how to be happy. Here's how to experience joy. You want to be happy? Here's the pathway.

There isn't any pathway to happiness that begins with the word self, right? Self-love, self-fulfillment, self-actualization. Maybe the only word that would work is self-aware. We've got to be self-aware to be a servant, but every other idea that begins with ourselves is a contradiction to what Jesus is saying here. Get on the pathway of a foot washer means you set aside your own personal desires, and there is joy in that. There's joy in serving. There's happiness in serving. Week to week I'm looking out at a lot of happy people because we have a serving community. We have a serving group, and I commend you for your heart to serve. I think while we can continue to grow in that, God has blessed us with a lot of wonderful examples of people who serve so faithfully.

What flows out of that then is unity. Jesus is going to give us a beautiful picture of this in the 17th chapter, so we'll wait for that, but what happens when there is joy in serving? What happens is there's a lot less strife. There's a lot less contention. There's a lot less jealousy. There's a lot less ambition. There's a lot less pride. All of those things, you just get pushed aside, and we serve each other in a spirit of joy and unity.

Then thirdly, the body is built up in love. The body is built up in love. That's what Paul is going to emphasize in Ephesians 4 when he talks about what the Word does in the life of a church. As the body of Christ is equipped, we grow into maturity, and there's not only joy and unity, but there's also the fact that we're being built up in love. So, in the eyes of Jesus, true spirituality, true Christ-likeness is about emptying oneself and choosing to serve others.

What do we take away? Here's what we take away. Our assignment for the week, our assignment for the rest of our life is very simple. Two words. Go low. Go low. Go low in serving others. Elders, deacons, go low. Church staff, go low. Community group leaders, Bible study leaders, go low. Dads, go low. Moms, husbands, wives, go low. Children, big brothers, big sisters, go low. Coworker, go low. Whatever role you're in, look for how you can be the foot washer. Look for how you can serve other people. Just think of how dramatically that changes the context in which you're doing that. Think how dramatically that changes the whole perspective within marriage, the whole perspective within our

home, how we relate to our parents, how we relate to our children, how we relate to our brother or sister, how we relate to our coworker. The impact is just like it is here in John 13.

These guys experience an unforgettable night, this unforgettable act, and it has an unforgettable impact because they got it, and you realize that as you look at the rest of the story of the lives of these men. They truly got it. They truly got it. They served their Lord even to death as foot washers. All of it is based on the gospel because the gospel brings all of us to the lowest point at the cross. There aren't any higher levels or lower. We're all at the same place. We all acknowledge that we've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's where we start. We understand that sin brings death and separation from God, and then we step into the beauty of the gospel, which says to us it's not about what we do. It's about what God has done for us in Christ. He died on the cross for my sin and yours, and if I believe that, God gives to me the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life, and he puts me on a path of happiness and joy in serving as a foot washer.

Let's pray. Father God, we're so thankful for this amazing and wonderful example of Jesus – the Son of God, very God of very God – yet willing to take upon himself the form of a servant and being found in likeness as a man, he humbled himself. He humbled himself to the point of death, even death on the cross. Father, I pray for anyone here this morning who has never trusted Jesus as their Savior, never experienced the forgiveness of sin, never experienced the joy of knowing that they have eternal life. Would you open their hearts right now and give them understanding and faith to believe, to trust that what you have said is true. Lord, for the rest of us, I pray we will take the attitude and heart of a foot washer and do all that we can to serve each other. In Christ's name, amen.