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JOHN 13:1-17

John Series: Get a Life in Jesus

[PRAYER] Lord, I so appreciated studying your word this week. I thank you for the truths and the applications and the principles that I see in this passage. Lord, these are your people and I pray that you would take the message from your word and take it into the hearts of your people here. That you would give me wisdom to say things in a way that are not distracting, but draw attention to your word. I pray that you'll help me with my memory to remember the things that are most important and necessary for us to live the lives in a way that take you home in our lives. So we're entrusting this time to you, Lord, and asking that you would speak in a powerful way. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today we start John 13. John 13-17 is a group of chapters that we call the Upper Room Discourse. They are a passage of scripture that is singled out in the Bible as this unique place. There are some places that are like that. Another time when Jesus' teaching was concentrated was in the Sermon on the Mount. So now we have the Sermon on the Mount and today we're coming to the Upper Room Discourse. In this Upper Room Discourse, we have this time right at Passover time when Jesus was eating the Passover with His disciples. As the scene unfolds and the curtain opens, we have the picture of Jesus there at the table there with all of His disciples and they're eating the Passover meal. So that's where we're going to pick up our story today.

If you would stand with me, I'm going to read the first 17 verses of John 13, which will be our text for today.

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so 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.

*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."
Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."
"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"*

Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "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."

You may be seated.

Now obviously the lesson in this passage is one about servanthood and Jesus is trying to communicate this idea to us, a very important idea that we would understand. He chooses to use an activity in order to communicate it. Now if we study the teaching techniques of Jesus, we learn that He taught in a lot of different ways. He taught in the Sermon on the Mount. A lot of that was a lecture style teaching. But He also used parables at times, told stories or windows that allowed us to get a glimpse into the truth. Those parables were helpful. He often taught through life experience. So He had the disciples actually participate in the feeding of the five thousand so they would learn from that experience as well.

Jesus was a master teacher and in this particular situation today, He chooses to teach using an activity. Because an activity has the way of communicating differently than anything else. That's why I chose to use an activity with the children today to give you an idea of how an activity can communicate an important message.

So Jesus is there saying I've got a message I want to communicate to these guys, the importance of servanthood and what that looks like. How will I communicate that? I know. I'll do an activity. A rather dramatic activity, a startling activity is what Jesus did. Because servants would wash people's feet, but someone like a rabbi would not be doing that. This would be a low task. So it was rather startling (and I would suggest uncomfortable) for the people involved.

But you see Jesus had a message that He wanted to communicate, a message having to do with the blessing that they would be able to enjoy in their lives. It reminds me of the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. If you go back to the passage of the Sermon on the Mount, you remember how it starts? It says – *Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who are peacemakers.* And it goes right down a list of things that you could be blessed if you have this kind of an attitude in your heart.

Well Jesus now wants to communicate that there's this reservoir of blessing available to you and me. That if you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you have access to this reservoir. There are certain things added to that you can put on, so to speak, as we see in the Beatitudes, or in this case servant attitude. When you put that on, then you have access to the reservoir of blessing that God has. That's what He wants to communicate, so He uses an activity in order to do that.

We're going to look at that activity. Our goal now is to look at the words in the passage, to look at this verse by verse and try to understand what are we going to take away and how are we going to apply this to our lives.

You can notice in the first couple verses here that we have the setting laid out. We see that this is just before the Passover feast, so that's where we are in this whole celebration. That Jesus knew that He had come to do the work of the Father. The emphasis there in on the love that He has for them. He wants them to know about this reservoir. He wants them to understand about the blessing. We see that the evening meal had started and that Judas had already made his plans. So that's already in the works that Judas has made this decision. He's probably wrestling and uncomfortable with that in the midst of this meeting. All of that is like the preview so we get the picture. As the stage curtains open, that's what we have to look at.

Now we're told what happens. I want to point out here in verse 3 it says Jesus knew something. We're going to see that actually as we continue down in the passage. Do you see where I underlined the word *knew* at the top? He knew. Because I think if you're going to be a servant, you need to know some things and you need to do some things. Know some things and do some things and that's going to connect with the blessing.

In fact I would suggest it's kind of formula that He's laying out here. The blessing comes from when you know some things and you do some things. The knowing is going to contribute to humility, necessary for a servant. You'll know, so you can be humble. And the doing communicates this idea of initiative. So if we have the humility and the initiative, then that makes up servanthood. That's what we're going to look at today. We're going to see it in the passage. What does it mean that we can be servants in our own lives and our own homes and our own workplaces. Wherever we are, we want to have an attitude of servanthood so we can tap into the blessing that God has for us.

So what does He know? Well if we look at verse 3, it says that He *knew that the Father had put all things under his power*. So He knew what He was responsible for. Servants know what they're responsible for. They have this part that's their job. Servants know that. The challenge gets to be in our lives when we start accumulating other things in part of the job and then we can't be a servant in the areas where God has put us in charge. So I would suggest that Jesus knew that and that's going to contribute to His humility because He knows what He needs to do. He knows what He's in charge of. And He knew what His mission was. He had come from God and was returning to God. So He had this sense of mission. So this sense of mission drove Him on and He wasn't distracted by other things in His life.

I think sometimes we can start thinking about the mission and the tasks of someone else. We might even take those on ourselves and we get distracted. Things get complicated in our lives. If I would focus on the things God's given me to do, I would do a lot better job than when I take on other stuff that really is not part of that.

I don't know about you, but I would suggest all of us have this busyness meter inside of us. When the busyness meter... For me let's say it's here. For you it may be higher or lower. I tend to be a rather busy person, so mine is on the high side. So I have this meter and when I'm at the meter, I'm pretty much managing life and I'm okay with how busy my life is. I like it that way. But then something happens or something takes place or I take on another task or something, and

my busyness gets higher than my level that I feel comfortable with. And then I feel stressed and I feel like I've got to get rid of this or I've got to deal with this particular period of time. I've got to somehow get over this so I can reduce that and I can get back to where my busyness meter is comfortable. But here's what also happens. When my task load decreases (I complete some projects or I fulfill some assignments) then my busyness meter level goes lower than my meter setting. And so what I do? I take on more stuff. I take on more stuff because I like to be here. That's where I feel comfortable and I enjoy that.

I think part of the task that we have if we're going to be servants is we must allow margin, that is we must allow ourselves to be a little less busy than our meter feels comfortable with so that we have an opportunity to do something with that time. When an opportunity comes for us to be a servant, will we be able to do that? That's the question. Or are we so busy and pressured that I don't have time for anybody but my task load. There's a certain humility that comes with understanding what my task load is.

When Jesus was teaching on the Sermon on the Mount, He said this: *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day is enough trouble of its own.* So it's not the amount of work that I get involved in. Or it's not even the number of things that I'm doing, but it's also the timing here is important. If I get consumed with all the things I need to do next week or next month, then I'm not focusing on what God has for me today.

So part of the aspect of this servanthood is Jesus knew what He was in charge of. He knew what He needed to do. If we're going to take on the role of a humble servant, which is going to provide us with the blessing that God has for us, then we need to, I think, maybe pause and consider what we're involved in and what we're doing and whether this is the job that God has called me to do. There was a time when Jesus was given the opportunity to be king and He says – *No, my time has not yet come yet.* Jesus had the ability to say no to things because they didn't fit in with His mission. He knew what His mission was.

So the first thing we see here is that Jesus had this humble attitude because He knew things. And that knowledge becomes important for Him as He's able to demonstrate humility to His disciples in this passage.

Well the next thing is to do. To know and to do. Doing implies initiative, so I underlined the verbs. Because those are action words in the next two verses, verse 4 and 5. *So 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.*

The idea is Jesus was involved in action. A servant heart is great, but to keep it just inside of your heart isn't enough. It requires that we take initiative and we do something about it. That we take the task on. That we go and do something.

One of the things I think we'll realize when we start taking initiative is that being a servant just takes a little bit more time. Just a little bit more time. If I'm pressured with my time already and I don't have that space, then when called on to be a servant at a different place, I don't have the time to give. But if I've arranged my life in such a way that I have some margin, then I have the ability to step in and say yes, I can help out, or I can do this, or whatever it is that I might do.

That initiative takes a little bit more time. I think it's true not just in business, but I also think it's true in the home.

I really like Ephesians 5:21 where it starts the marriage passage – *husbands and wives*. And the first thing it says is *submit to one another*. There's this initiative that we're having with each other that's helping us to be able to have this relationship together, a servant kind of relationship. We need to take initiative. So if we have a humble heart and we take initiative, then we're starting to form this idea of what servanthood is all about. And that's what He was doing. Servanthood is this ability to pay attention to others. To think about other people. To not think too highly of ourselves, as Romans says.

I like the story about the boys who decided to set up a club. There were only three of them, but they built themselves a little fort in the backyard. They built the clubhouse and then they decided they're going to have some rules. Well what kind of rules should we have in our club? Every club needs rules, they said. And one of the boys said, "I've got an idea. Let's have one rule. Nobody act big. Nobody act small. Everybody act medium." And I like that. I think that's the idea here that Jesus is trying to communicate. Because He's going to tie this into I'm the Lord and the Teacher, He's going to say, but I'm acting as a servant. So everyone needs to have this servant heart as they're proceeding through life.

It's always easier if there's someone else. If you're in a servant kind of role, you're trying to be a servant in your home or your work or in the neighborhood, it's always great if the other person is also a servant. Right? But if the other person is arrogant or the other person has a blind spot and they're mean or take advantage of you, it's really hard to be a servant in those cases. Then we'd be a servant for the Lord, which we should do anyway. We should be a servant unto the Lord. But we do it for the Lord, not for the person that's in the house that we're serving because they just take advantage of us anyway. But we still have this servant heart.

Well that's what's in the passage, I think, because Jesus is going to come to Peter. Peter doesn't really know what he's doing. He's kind of the guy who speaks first and thinks later. He has some real challenges. Let's look at Peter's story here and see what happens to him.

So in verse 6 it says – *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"* The wheels are already turning inside of him. What is he going to do when Jesus gets to him? Because one of the things that's true about servanthood is that it repeats itself. It's not just a one-time thing. You have to do it over and over again. There's twelve of these guys that Jesus is going to. But when He gets to Peter, He finds a roadblock. So servanthood happens over and over and over again. It's not just a quick thing that we do here and we check it off our list. We continue doing it.

Let me point out that Peter is going to take a little more time than the other guys. There's some people in our lives that seem to take a little more time than other people take of our time. If you've got a bunch of kids in your home, it's often the case that one of those is going to want more time than the others. Somehow we need to minister to that child who is a little more challenged, shall we say, needy than others might be. And Jesus does that. Peter seems to be more needy than the other disciples. They're going to have their feet washed, but when we get to Peter, he's going to have a discussion about it.

I like it that Jesus takes time with Peter. So Peter says, *“Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”* Jesus replied, *“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”* This is going to make more sense later.

Peter has a lot of audacity to say the next word. He says, *“No”* (verse 8). I don't think you ever say no to Jesus. I just don't think that's a good idea. In fact I say to children regularly, *“You don't say no to your mother. Okay? You're in the habit... She tells you to do something, you say no, that is not... You never use the word no with your mother. You can't do that. You do what she says.”* And similar with Jesus. We do what He says. You don't say no to Jesus. But that's what Peter does. *“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

Well Peter had a problem. If you look at Peter, he's the kind of guy in life who had a lot of confidence, probably had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. They didn't have medication in those days, so he just got out of the boat in the middle of the storm or he cut the servant's ear off in the garden. He's the guy who speaks out of turn. So Jesus is continually having to correct him, as we do with children who have attention deficit disorder. They are magnets for correction. So it seems to be a continual thing and Peter is one of those guys that's being corrected regularly. He had a lot of confidence, didn't have a lot of faith in some of those situations. Didn't have humility. So I think the lesson that's being taught here in the upper room, in this servant activity that Jesus is conducting is designed just for Peter. Although, of course, others benefit from it.

I like to say to kids, *“Do you know there's a verse in the Bible just for you? Let me share this verse because I think that's true.”* And the message today might be just for you. That's why you came today because you needed us to read this verse of the Bible so you could take it away because this is just for you, that servanthood. And that's how personal God's message is.

So He says to Peter, *“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”* So as Peter goes from one extreme to the other now he says – *“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”* So he's just taking a lot of time to get this activity down. Now let's just get through the activity Jesus is trying to do, but He's taking time with Peter to help him understand a little bit. Because in the end He wants Peter to get the message.

The message is that we all need to be servants. Sometimes being a servant means you let someone else care for you. In fact sometimes it's easier to wash stinky feet than it is to put your stinky feet out there and let someone else wash them. Both of those things require humility. It's that humility that Jesus is trying to teach Peter through an experience because Peter is an experiential learner. We see that all through. He gets things by experience, so Jesus is allowing this experience to teach Peter something very important about His own humility in His life.

So Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

So after Jesus was done with the activity, then He got at the end and He got the people together and He said, *“Okay, we're going to talk about this. I want to tell you, ask you, why did we do this activity?”* That's what He's saying to them. Let's discuss this. We just did an activity. Why? What did we learn from this? And He says – *“Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them.* Here's the lesson: That education and position don't change the fact that you need to

be a servant. So He's saying – "*Teacher*' (or educated one) *and* *Lord*' (the boss), you call me these two things *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.*"

So there's an important lesson here that He's talking about. Foot washing, certainly, but it's this deeper underlying issue of servanthood. And it doesn't tie into what position you have. We don't graduate out of servanthood, I guess is the appropriate way to say this. That servanthood isn't just for the newbies who's coming on. Servanthood isn't just for the entry level position. That the best, the person in leadership or the person who's educated is the person who's going to say okay, I'm going to be a servant, a servant leader. So servanthood is this valuable lesson. Jesus wants to teach them so they'll get it for their lives and they can be blessed. That's the idea here.

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. And now comes the punchline. This is the formula. This is the conclusion that we've been talking about and this is what Jesus wants them to get and understand. He says blessings are going to come if you know and you do. That's what it says. If you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. So you have to know them and do them in order to receive the blessing.

I'm convinced that God has a very important blessing that He wants to share with us in our lives. So that word *blessing*, I'm just going to take you to that word. The Greek word is *makario*. So blessing can be defined this way: The fortunate position of receiving God's extended grace.

Notice the blessing is coming to the person who's being a servant. I want you to see that because when you're a servant, here's what happens. When you're a servant and you're helping someone, you're extending grace to them. That's what you're doing. You're giving grace to them. You're doing something for them they don't deserve really. Or maybe they do, but you're being a servant to them. You're doing something for them. But notice that blessed means it's this fortunate position of receiving God's extended grace. If you want to be blessed, Jesus says...and that's what He says in the passage. Be blessed if you know and do these things. Then you're going to be a servant and God's going to use this and this avenue for you to receive and open up the reservoir of His blessing so that you can receive it yourself.

We practice servanthood, not as obligation only to get something done because God has called us to be servants. We do it because we know that obeying God provides blessing for us. That's why we give and that's why we serve with our time, and that's why we care for someone or something.

Blessing. The fortunate position of receiving God's extended grace. And it comes to the person who's giving, not just the person who's receiving this idea of servanthood. Very important lesson.

See, Jesus loves these people so much. He wants them to get the kingdom principle. If they'll get this kingdom principle, then it will help them. That's why He's intent, both in the Sermon on the Mount and here as He enters in the Upper Room Discourse, to teach this lesson. Blessings are available to you. They don't just come because you accept me as your Lord and Savior. They come by that first. That just gives you access to the reservoir, but then you have to do these

things that open up that reservoir so that you can receive that blessing. You have to position yourself in a way that allows the grace to flow into your life.

Makarios. Blessing. I love that word and I just pondered it this week. So I'm kind of laboring there with you because I just think it's just an important idea in this passage that Jesus is trying to communicate. Don't get lost with the word *blessed*. It is the key word in the passage. The other one is *servant*, which isn't even used. The word *servant* isn't used all the way through the passage until you get to the end, and that's the second word I want to show you. It's the word *doulos* or servant.

Servant is someone who willingly does something uncomfortable for someone else's benefit. I do think that some servanthood things are easier to do than others. Some people are easier to serve than others. But most of the time servanthood is uncomfortable. It takes just a little bit more time to stop by the store and pick up those things that you know are needed for someone. It takes just a little more time and it's a little bit uncomfortable to listen to someone. When you listen to someone and you're interested in their story, that's entertaining. When you listen past the time you're interested in, you feel a little uncomfortable, but you listen anyway, that's servanthood. Listening, I think, is a servant activity.

In fact I use this idea of foot washing a lot. I'll say to kids, "You know, we don't really do foot washing in our culture because we wear shoes. They didn't wear shoes in those days. So we don't do foot washing. But I'll tell you how you can be more of a servant in your home. You could listen to people when they're talking and you already know what they're going to say. But you give them a little bit more time even though you're uncomfortable with it. You go ahead and listen to them."

This idea of being uncomfortable is resident within the passage. I'm sure you can feel if you were there. First of all, you see Jesus get up and you wonder, "Oh, I wonder are we leaving? Are we going somewhere?" And He goes and He takes His robe off and He goes and gets some water. You're wondering, "What is He doing?" Then He gets a towel and wraps it around His waist, and then He goes and He starts going to the first disciple and you start feeling uncomfortable. When He bends down to start washing the feet, you're going, "Uh oh. What's He doing? Did somebody do something wrong? Is somebody supposed to wash feet and they forgot to do it? Why is He doing that? He shouldn't be doing that job. Maybe I should take over and do it for Him." You know he's starting to feel that uncomfortable feeling that you would feel if you were in the room wondering, "Maybe I should take on this job for Him. He shouldn't really be doing this. This isn't His place." And then He goes on and you're saying, "Okay. He's washing everybody's feet." And then He gets to Peter. Now everything gets uncomfortable because Peter wants to have this dialogue with Him. So we're all feeling uncomfortable now because Jesus is dialoguing with Peter about what he should and shouldn't do when it comes to this foot washing thing. And then He goes and He sits down and He relieves the uncomfortable feeling by talking about the lesson learned. "Oh I get it now. I understand."

But the uncomfortable feeling is something Jesus wants to transmit to you and me. He wants us to feel uncomfortable in this area of servanthood. He wants us to know that yes, it's going to take you a little bit longer for you to pick up that stuff off the floor for someone else that isn't your job. It's going to take a little extra time to clean up that thing that was someone else's mess or file that paperwork that somebody else should've done. That's a servant task. When you go and do a

servant task, it is a little bit uncomfortable and Jesus wants us all to understand this. That uncomfortable feeling is part of your gift to the Lord. It's part of this opening up of the blessing and you're going to benefit from it.

There's some people who when they do their servant tasks, they start feeling resentful. "Why do I have to do this? This isn't my job. She should have done it on her own. Or he should have done this. I'm having to do somebody else's job."

Sometimes when we're teaching children how to be servants or how to show honor in the home, mom will say, "Okay son, go do an honor check in the bathroom." The child will go in there and say, "Mom, it's only the pajamas on the floor." And she'll say, "Go ahead. Put them away." "That's not my job. Those aren't my things." That's not children only. It's adults too. We're going, "How come I've got to do this? This isn't my stuff." So we start feeling resentful sometimes about the tasks that we do.

Jesus is saying blessing is waiting. It's there. When that blessing is waiting, then we access that through servanthood, which requires that we think, we know. We know. We know something and we do something. That we have a humble response because we know it and we take initiative because we do it. Those two words are resident in this passage of what Jesus wants to understand in our lives. There are blessings to this and Jesus who was the Son of God came and modeled this for us to remind us that we too have a responsibility and a blessing when it comes to service.

I encourage you to take this home. I'd be excited to hear how God uses this in your life, what He does inside of you in regards to servanthood. It'll be great to hear a testimony. Shoot me an email or maybe you're willing to share it on a Sunday morning. "Here's what God's teaching me through His word" and we could share that lesson with other people as well.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] It is such a gift, Lord, to see the example of Jesus Christ here on earth. We're just so grateful that you sent Jesus to be this living word so that we could get it. Get that message about who you are. To understand more about your compassion, your care, and your love for us. So we thank you for this example written in your word. Lord, I ask that you'd help us to know how to apply this to our lives. Likely there are people that we think about that are hard to serve sometimes. I ask that you'd give us the ability to serve them. We know that it's often through that you open up relationship and encourage that relationship. And sometimes even healing enters that as well. So Lord, I ask that you would also bless those people. Especially I think of moms and dads who are serving in their homes on a regular basis. I pray, Lord, that you would bless them and help them to experience that blessing in a powerful way. Continue to work in our hearts as we worship you. In Jesus' name, amen.