

# John 13:1-120 - The calling to serve

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 10 May 2026

Preacher: Simeon Nichols

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. Today reading will be in the book of John chapter 13 and 1 to 20. 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 Simeon, Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had pulled 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 put water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simeon 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.

[ 1 : 26 ] Jesus answered, Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then, Lord, Simeon Peter replied, Not just my feet, but my hand 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 everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his cloth and returned to his place.

Do you understand what I have done to you? 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.

[ 2 : 33 ] Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor his messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know all these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Amen.

Thanks very much, Alex. And hi everyone. My name is Simeon. I'm one of the members here at West Kilburn.

And it's an exciting time, isn't it? Coming to God's word, seeing what he has to say. Okay, so why don't we commit our time to the Lord here. Gracious Father, we just thank you so much for your word, that you speak to us.

And Lord, we just long to hear you. We long to be open to what you have to say. So we pray that you would help me with the words of my mouth be pleasing in your sight.

And help all of us to have hearts that are willing to listen to you. Because we do pray for your glory. Amen. Well, it's embarrassing to admit the depth of our need, isn't it?

[ 3 : 44 ] Recently, we took a trip to Northern Ireland to see the new in-laws, my new in-laws. We like them a lot. Hopefully they'll watch the recording so they can hear that.

Get some in-law points. But at one point in the trip, Hannah, my wife, was having some trouble with a jar, opening a jar. So, naturally, I stepped up, took the jar, twisted it, twisted it, nothing.

My dad takes it, pop, open, no trouble. I did need his help, but omitting it wasn't easy.

We hate to admit our need, don't we? It's embarrassing to admit our weakness. That we can't do something. Not that I couldn't have opened a jar, obviously.

Because if I wanted to, I could have. But if I'm too proud to admit when I need help, then the help's not going to come, is it?

[ 4 : 53 ] But when we realise that we need help, we need saving effectively, then we put our hands up, we ask, I need help. So it takes humility to be served, but it also takes humility to serve, doesn't it?

And we don't really like to serve too much. Because, if I'm honest, my time and my needs are slightly more important than your needs.

And so, I don't like to be asked too much of, because it might interfere with my plans, with my dreams, my day. But, I do think when we find a worthwhile cause, or a calling, if you like, then we are willing to serve.

We really do want to serve. We think it's worth it. And Jesus speaks into those two things in our passage today. Humility to be served, and humility to serve.

Because we need to admit how deeply we need him, our humility to be served. And just how high his call is for us.

[ 6 : 07 ] We need to admit the depth of our need, and the height of our calling. So, I don't know where you're at today. Maybe today you're actually thinking, I'm pretty happy.

I don't think I need Jesus. You know, I'm not too interested in what he wants for me. Or maybe you're a Christian. Maybe you know you need him, and you actually want to carry out whatever he has for you.

So, wherever we're at, we need John 13 to speak to us today. And it might well humble us. It might be a little bit uncomfortable.

Because it's going to show us just how much we need Jesus to serve us. And my prayer is that it would spur us on to jump on board with his mission for us.

So, don't be scared. This isn't just going to be about doing more stuff. Filling up your plate even more. But it's much more heart challenging than that. So, let's strap in three things that we need to think rightly about to get our place in serving right.

[ 7 : 15 ] What do we need to think rightly about? First, we need to see how low you need Jesus to go. That kind of makes me think of the game Limbo.

You know, how low can you go? Well, I'm terrible at that game. But I think Jesus would be good at it. And you'll see why. And anyway, with that really helpful image in our heads, the way that Jesus acts here is actually pretty outrageous.

So, yeah, just like we heard in the kids' life. They're having a nice dinner. And then all of a sudden, verse 4. Take a look. If you close your Bibles, grab it back out.

Verse 4. He's taking off his outer clothing. He's taking off his robe and his cloak. And he's wrapping a towel around his waist. Uh-oh.

Ding, ding, ding. Alarm bells for the disciples. He looks like a servant. He looks like the lowest of servants. And now he's on his hands and knees.

[ 8 : 23 ] He's washing his disciples' feet. Can you imagine the awkwardness in the room of Bartholomew and Thomas giving each other the wide eyes?

Like, what is going on? This is completely upside down. After the day of walking around in sandals, you can imagine the smell. And you can imagine the layers of dirt.

This is not a job for their superior rabbi. But it's a job for a servant, right? An inferior servant. So, Jesus is humiliating himself.

So, Peter steps up. Are you going to wash my feet? Verse 6. No way, Lord.

You're the one that God has sent. I won't let you stoop so low. But you don't get it, Jesus says.

Verse 7. You do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you'll understand.

[ 9 : 26 ] Peter's not happy, is he? No. You shall never wash my feet. Oh, boys. It's getting heated. So, Jesus has to tell him straight.

Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. What's he saying? Well, that word part is often used to do with inheritance.

So, think of the lost son. Give me my inheritance. Give me my part. So, to have a share with Jesus, a part with Jesus, is to share in what God will give him.

To share in his glory. To know the living and true God, now and in eternity. And Jesus says, if you don't let me wash your feet, then you can't have that.

And I wonder if that seems like a bit of an over-exaggeration to you. A bit like saying to your sister, if you don't let me make you a cup of tea, then you're out of this family.

[10:28] But, the stakes are way higher, aren't they? Because cleaning here is a picture. And it explains people's spiritual reality. And their eternal destiny.

So, our sin, that's everything in us that wants to live our way and resist God's way. It's like this layer of dirt between us and God. And he's a perfect God.

He's perfectly just and pure and right. Nothing impure can even come near him. Nothing wrong can be tolerated by him.

And that is good news, right? Because that means he won't let any wrongdoing go unpunished. But it's also bad news for anyone who has ever done wrong.

For anyone who's not perfect. Because it's like this big giant wall that we've built with our own hands that separates us from God. So, our sin means that we can't be with Jesus in this life and we can't be with him in the next.

[11:36] So, that's a pretty bleak situation. It's a big problem. And what Peter doesn't understand yet is that this whole act of service, what Jesus is doing, points to the solution.

It's actually what this whole section of John is going to be leading up to. And verse 1 is the introduction to it. It says, The hour has come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father. So, he's about to die. And when he dies, all of that dirt and filthiness of our hearts that meant that we couldn't be with God, he took it on himself.

He faced the judgment of the Father so that he can say, verse 10, he can say, you are clean. So, there's a separation in the room here, isn't there, between Judas and everyone else.

If you look halfway through verse 10, Jesus says, You are clean, but not every one of you. But he knew who was going to betray him.

[12:48] And that was why he said, not every one of you was clean. So, there's a separation in this room too, right? We're either spiritually clean or not.

We either know God or we don't. And it's nothing to do with how much we serve or give or attend. It's either those that have admitted their need for the cross or haven't.

And maybe we need to think more on Jesus' response to Peter here. Peter, he hated the idea of Jesus serving him. He says, No way.

But Jesus, it's like he says, Don't you see the extent of your need? I have to do this for you. I have to sink this low for you and way further to die for you.

And I love you too much, not to. It's embarrassing to admit the depth of our need, isn't it? How low we need him to go. How we need him to die for us.

[14:02] And it's the only way to be right with God, to have a part with Jesus, to share in his heaven. Because, yes, our sin is that awful, is that serious.

And you might feel the burden of that today. You might feel the weight of your sin making you feel impure or ashamed.

But actually, the beauty of Jesus' offer here is that he will wash it away. That night that we just can't forget. Those words that we wish we could take back.

And that thing which we haven't told anyone. Like a teacher at the end of the day wiping the whiteboard clean. Or they're probably just all digital now.

Just press a button. But it's gone. You can't see it anymore. We're washed, pure, acceptable to God. Nothing held against you and welcomed into his eternity.

[15:03] And all because Jesus, in the words of Philippians 2.7, made himself nothing. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So if we get this, if we understand this, when we want to burst out like Peter, wash me. Verse 9, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

We need Jesus to give everything to save us. and we need to see just how low he still needs to go even after we're saved.

So that's our second thing that we need to see. You never stop needing his service. So verse 10, those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet.

Their whole body is clean and you are clean. So Peter's clean. He's had a whole body wash. In other words, he's forgiven by God.

[16:13] But he still has to see his need for this foot wash. So, what's that all about? Well, it's a beautiful picture of our constant need for forgiveness.

Not to save us again, because Jesus' death has already changed our status with God, right? The disciples are already clean. In verse 10, they're pure in his sight.

This foot wash is about ongoing relationship with God. Because our sin, it hinders our walk with God every day. We know that, don't we?

It entangles us. It trips us up. And, undealt with, it makes our relationship with God unhealthy and unhappy.

Maybe you feel that today. Because we start to welcome again the very things that separated us from God in the first place. It's like they stick to our feet.

[ 17 : 13 ] And so Jesus needs to stoop low and wash our feet from the very sin that he died to forgive. And I wonder if it's even harder to admit our constant failure that we've messed up again.

Like a child not wanting to admit that they've wet the bed again. We want to be the finished article. not after 10, 20, 50 years of being a Christian still constantly needing Jesus to wash our dirt away. It's embarrassing. But we have to admit our need. So I think humility looks like saying sorry to God and trying to steer clear of the mud which holds us back from that healthy happy life with God.

So just as a quick side note, it's not about ritual confession. I don't need to have a special prayer or I don't need a special person to, like a priest, to save me, re-save me, bring me back to God.

This is all about a heart and a mindset change that we constantly need to walk with the Lord. We constantly need forgiveness. forgiveness. But if you're anything like me, I think when I've disobeyed him, I kind of feel like I need to wait a little while before I come back to him to show that I'm not that bad.

[ 18 : 51 ] Maybe let the dust settle a bit. As if I think that if I come straight back to God, he'll be like, look at what you've just done. Like, you think I'm going to forgive you after just literally a second ago you disobeyed me.

But that's actually, that's the devil's way of thinking because I don't have to prove myself worthy or to earn his love again. My relationship with him is always going to be dependent on his love and his forgiveness.

So I need to run back to him at that very moment. So I want to ask, is there sin that you don't want to get rid of that's sticking to your feet?

Because that's a dangerous thing, right? Run back to Jesus. Have that dirt that's hindering your walk with him washed away.

So see how much we need him. See how low we need him to go. We need Jesus to die for us. And we never stop needing his service. We need Jesus to keep forgiving us.

[ 20 : 04 ] Jesus serves and he keeps serving and he will keep serving even into eternity. And the scary thing is that Jesus sets the bar for us.

Right? That might sound a bit shocking or confusing, but that's the third thing that we need to see. We need to see how high our calling is.

Do you see how high your calling is? So take a look with me at verse 15. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you.

Now, we obviously aren't called to die to give people eternal life. We can't save people like that. but we're called to serve like Jesus.

So to go low for the sake of others and even for the sake of their salvation. Now that is a high calling.

[ 21 : 07 ] I'm not sure there could be a higher one. How can we ever attain to that? How can we ever have hearts that really want to serve like that? Well, Jesus gives us three life-changing truths here and they're three phrases that I really want to fix in my mind so that they'll give me a heart that wants to serve.

And I know three might sound like a lot of ground but we'll move quickly and I just couldn't not share these with you. So stick with me. Here we go.

Phrase number one. I'm not better than Jesus. Now, it feels a little bit awkward saying that like how proud do you think we are?

Like I think I'm better than Jesus? But actually Jesus does think that there's a danger of us thinking this way. So take a look at verse 16.

Very truly I tell you. So this is Jesus' way of saying I'm about to tell you something crucial. So get the highlighter ready, get the pen ready for the double underlining because what's he going to say?

[ 22 : 23 ] Very truly I tell you no servant is greater than his master nor a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

So Jesus is the greatest, right? There's no one greater than Jesus who's walked this planet. And verse three, all things are under his power.

Literally he's in charge of everything. And yet his mindset was to go way to the bottom of the pile to lay aside his glory and his status, become a man and to give his life for those who hated him.

And we're not greater than Jesus, are we? No one is. So that means that there's no task too low for the Christian, right?

There's no position too inferior. If Jesus was willing to go so low for me, how low am I willing to go for others?

[ 23 : 31 ] So we're not better than Jesus. And second, service is greatness. The reason Jesus served was because of his importance, because of his importance, not in spite of it.

So this is backwards to how we think of it. So Jesus, he knows his authority, he's in charge of everything, verse 3, and he's come from God and he's going back to God.

And it's because of that that he serves. So we think that authority and status, greatness, it should mean reward now, shouldn't it?

I should get honour and status, I should have a comfortable life, I should have riches, I'm working hard for my gain, right?

That's the way we're taught to think. But Jesus flips it, he says the role of the greatest is to serve. And our word, prime minister, I don't know if you know, it literally means first servant.

[ 24 : 35 ] And I think Jesus would be pretty happy with that. The one at the top should be the first to serve. And I wonder if we have that mindset, are we the first to serve?

Are we the prime minister of our home? Are you the prime minister at work? Are you the prime minister for God's people? Because instead of saying I'm important, serve me, my job is important, my time is important, so serve me, we need to flip it.

It's how can I use my important time to serve you? So we're not better than Jesus, service is greatness, and lastly, we have an eternity changing mission.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a messenger, like in verse 16, a messenger sent by Jesus? He gave his disciples this life saving message, right?

So that the people who accepted them, who accepted that message, accepted Jesus himself. Take a peek at verse 20, very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send, accepts me.

[ 25 : 57 ] And in the same way, we we represent Jesus to the world. And those who accept us and the message that we pass on, the gospel, accept the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

So we're his ambassadors serving so that others might be saved. Did you catch that?

we're the Lord's ambassadors serving so that other people might be saved. But how high a calling? Could there be a higher one?

Going low so that others might hear and believe. Is there any length that it's not worth going to? Is there any energy or money or time that's not worth giving?

And we've got to start to rethink, ask ourselves questions about things like, is the beach holiday worth giving up for the Christian summer camp?

[ 27 : 04 ] Or is respect worth losing to share about what I heard about the sermon at work tomorrow? Or is a little bit less in the bank account worth it so that more people, the unreached, can hear the gospel?

Well, obviously there's good reasons to not do those specific things. That's just to help us to examine our hearts and think, do we believe that we have this eternity changing mission from the Lord?

So those are our three statements. Can you imagine what would change if we woke up in the morning with these things ringing in our ears? Like, I'm not better than Jesus.

Service is greatness. I have an eternity changing mission. How much more would my heart want to serve him? And so that means that today we're not going away with a list of things to do, but it's about a heart that says, I know the depths of my need.

I see how low Jesus went for me. It's a heart that cries out, I know how high my calling is. I want to serve for others and for their salvation.

[ 28 : 25 ] salvation. And man, I wish I was less of a hypocrite in this really. I wish I made my life more about this calling. And maybe some of you are in the same boat.

So we need to pray because we can nod along this morning, we can have all of our intentions in the right place, but let's go for it, let's follow our Lord.

So I'll leave you with the Lord Jesus' words in verse 17. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Let's pray, shall we? Gracious Heavenly Father, we come before you and we admit how much we need you.

And we just pray that we would admit that more and more. We just thank you so much for how low Jesus went for us, that he was willing to become nothing for us so that we can know you.

[ 29 : 28 ] That he's willing to keep having mercy on us, to keep forgiving us, and we just pray that you would help us to never move away from that, never move away from the cross. If there's anything here Lord today that you're convicting us of or prompting us to lay aside or to repent of, to turn back to you, we just pray that you would give us the boldness and trust to do that.

And Lord give us hearts that want to serve like Jesus. Keep that mission on our hearts and in our minds and help us to follow Jesus more each day.

Because we do pray it for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.