

# The humility of God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Alright, well let's open up our Bible. We're in that passage, John chapter 13. So if you do have a Bible in front of you, you can use the church Bible there, John chapter 13.

And we're going to focus on that famous scene where Jesus washes the feet of his disciples, the first 18 or so verses. And my title for today, The Humility of God.

The Humility of God. And as we come into the passage, let me remind you of who God is.

It's always a good thing for us to do. Let's stop and think about who this wonderful God is we worship. Quick observations, let me give you five. Who is God? First of all, the Bible teaches us that our God has all power.

Good to reflect on that. He created the world from nothing. That's a staggering fact, isn't it? Beyond human comprehension.

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     Speaking of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, the Bible says in Colossians 1, God is the king.

God is the ruler and God has all power. Secondly, the Bible teaches us that God knows everything.

Theologians speak about God's omniscience. Peter says as much to Jesus at the end of John's Gospel in 21 verse 17, where Peter says to Jesus, Lord, you know all things.

Nothing escapes his attention in all the universe. Because he knows literally everything. Thirdly, he's also omnipresent.

In other words, he is everywhere. There's no place in the cosmos where he's not present. There's nowhere anybody can hide.

[ 2 : 3 2 ]     There's nowhere in the universe where he's not present. Including hell, by the way. Psalm 139 verse 7, David writes, Where can I go from your presence?

So he's everywhere. He knows everything. He has all power. Fourthly, he is perfectly righteous and holy. He's the very embodiment of moral perfection.

This great God. He cannot tolerate sin. Because we're all sinners. It's good to be reminded that on occasion he has been a terrible, terrible judge. Think about those at least 600,000 Israelites who died in the desert in the book of Numbers because they wouldn't obey him.

They didn't take him seriously. Very serious thing. He's a holy God. He takes sin far more seriously than we do. If we're not for the gospel, we wouldn't so easily come into church on a Sunday and just take his benevolence for granted.

He's a great and a holy God. Psalm 24, our writer, says this. David writes, He's a perfect God.

[ 4 : 0 0 ]     He's a holy God. He's a righteous God. He's pure in every way. Fifthly, he's a jealous God.

We read in Deuteronomy 4, verse 24, For the Lord your God is a consuming fire and jealous God. He will not tolerate a rival when it comes to our worship of him.

God, in other words, is not a cold, austere God, emotionally distant from the creation and the deeds of men.

Some of us see him that way, but that's not the case. He cares deeply for his creation. He cares for what men do. He's deeply impacted by the sin and the rebellion of men and women.

He knows what goes on in the world. He watches the deeds of man. And he is an emotional God. We forget that as well.

[ 5 : 12 ] We mustn't separate his power and his majesty from his emotional life. He's a God whose emotions are as deep and as wide as all of his power and his knowledge.

We read in the prophet Nahum, chapter 1, Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire.

The rocks are shattered before him. He's an emotional God. He's a jealous God. He feels betrayed when we sin against him.

And his emotions burn within him. Now, as you consider who this God is, just those five observations that I've made, let me ask you this.

If this God became a man, if this God became a man, what would he be like? We take our knowledge of Jesus and the New Testament out of our minds.

[ 6 : 18 ] We put it to one side for a moment. If what I had just told you is all you knew about God, and if you were informed that this God was about to assume flesh and become human, what would you think?

Would it necessarily be good news? I don't think so. I think it might well be bad news if we knew nothing about Jesus.

Imagine this all-consuming, fearsome power, this awesome majesty, infinite holiness and knowledge becoming present among us in a human being.

I don't think that it is necessarily good news. I think it's a frightening prospect, one of pending judgment. Now in the Gospel of John today, before we come to our chapter, let me remind you of those magnificent verses at the beginning of the Gospel of John that many of us know.

John chapter 1 from verse 1 to verse 2, where we read right at the beginning of John's Gospel, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

[ 7 : 31 ] That's Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ is this God. That's who Jesus is.

Then we read in John chapter 1 verse 14, if you bring your eyes a little bit down in John chapter 1, you read in verse 14, the Word, this Word, became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

So that's exactly what happened with Jesus Christ. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. So in Jesus becoming a man, or as some would say, in his incarnation, this is precisely what happened.

Jesus said this, by the way, in John chapter 12 verse 45, the one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me.

To look at Jesus, to touch Jesus, to hear his words, is to encounter the self-same almighty God, this holy God, all majesty, all power, all glory, all knowledge and wisdom.

[ 8 : 52 ] to encounter Jesus, to encounter Jesus, is to encounter this God. And that is what makes this passage even more remarkable and magnificent.

The passage that was read out to us a little bit earlier on, where the Lord Jesus, this Jesus, washes the feet of his own disciples in John chapter 13 from verse 1 to verse 18.

Now my title again is The Humility of God, The Humility of God. And while up to this point I have certainly presented to you a true picture of who God is, thank God I haven't given you the full picture.

Because in this story, John introduces the reader of his gospel to Jesus in the latter part of his gospel where the Lord Jesus Christ prepares himself for the cross.

We're coming now to study an incident in Jesus' ministry, an incident that took place near the end of his ministry. And I encourage you to have John chapter 13 open in front of you.

[ 9 : 59 ] If you look at your first verse, we read there in John 13 verse 1, having loved his own, who were in the world, he loved them to the uttermost or he loved them to the end.

The one characteristic of God that I haven't discussed at this point is God's love. Jesus loves his disciples to the end. And of course, what stuns us, what takes us off God if we don't know this passage, is the incredible way in which God's love is expressed in this passage, specifically the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This God's love for his people, this magnificent, holy God, this glorious God, his love for his people causes him to humbly leave his dwelling in heaven and assume our humanity and wash the disciples' feet.

In fact, the very decision of our creator to come into the world as a man expresses, in the most unprecedented way, God's humility.

You just will not find it in any of the other religions. So let's consider how this passage teaches us that God is a humble God.

[ 11 : 28 ] Somebody said to me the other day, God is a gentleman. Isn't that remarkable? The God who created the world from nothing, all power and majesty and authority, is a humble, gentle man.

We see that in the passage in two ways. First of all, Jesus' humility manifested in his restraint from verse 1 to verse 3. He's a holy God.

He's a scary God. Remember that story in the Old Testament where Moses asked God to see his glory. A very dangerous thing that Moses asked.

And God replied and said, in actual fact, no man can look on me and live in Exodus 33 and verse 20. That's who this God is. So bearing in mind what we know about God's greatness, how do we even begin to appreciate the unbelievable restraint shown by Jesus here?

Once again, here we have the same God as a man. Look at John chapter 13 verse 3. Jesus knew.

[ 12 : 52 ] So what was Jesus thinking about at that moment when he washed the disciples' feet? Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

Imagine waking up this morning and realizing with complete certainty that God had given you all power. think about that.

What would you do? At that moment Jesus realizes that he has all power and he washes the disciples' feet. The power that created the world is the Son's power.

The power for the Son to do as he pleases. Jesus, you know, as I looked at this passage again this week I thought about it. You know, if God gave me all power what would I do?

Of course, I'm a Christian so I'd be nice. I'd be good with my power. I probably wouldn't kill anybody.

[ 14 : 06 ] but there are people who annoy me. There are people who irritate me. So I would probably have to imprison a few people.

I might have to teach a few people a good lesson if I had all power. power. We know that famous quote from the English nobleman Lord Acton who said absolute power corrupts.

Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. What would I do if I had all power? It's a terrifying prospect.

And here we have the holy God who hates sin created the world and the person of Jesus reaching out to wash the feet of his disciples including the one who is going to betray him to the devil and ultimately to the cross.

How does the preacher even begin to do justice to the magnificence of this passage? To thank Jesus for his restraint.

[ 15 : 21 ] The restraint shown by Jesus here is beyond description it's beyond belief. There's all power he knows at that point that the father has placed all things under his feet.

He's got every right to just zap Judas. That's what I would have done. I would have crushed Judas like a bug. That's not what Jesus does.

He chooses to show mercy even reaching out to Judas. to Peter chapter three and verse nine the apostle Peter writes he is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance.

Restraint. Look at John chapter 13 and verse 26 then dipping the piece of bread he gave it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot. He knows what's in the heart of Judas and yet what restraint reaches out to Judas one last time in relationship and reconciliation.

It was the last chance that Judas had. You know that in that culture in the ancient Middle Eastern culture and environment it was a privilege for the host to serve a guest with his own hand and the fact that Judas was within range of Jesus' hand suggests that he occupied an honoured seat at the dinner.

[ 16 : 53 ] It puts into perspective does it not not only the restraint of our Lord Jesus Christ but just how despicable and how heinous Judas' betrayal really was.

And yet Jesus washed Judas' feet the self-control self-control. By the way as husbands and as men a great model for us self-control.

This is something that a servant might have to do but never the host at a dinner. A host would never ever wash the feet of his guests. But God the God of the book of Genesis the God who created the mountains and the hills and the seas the God who brings about a change in the seasons for God to wash the feet of men surely surely not.

It's absurd isn't it in a sense to wash the feet of Judas the self-control and the restraint of our Lord Jesus Christ.

How can it be possible for anyone here today not to be moved by such loving gentle restraint of our Savior?

[ 18 : 20 ] So how is Jesus' humility evident in our text? Well, first of all by his restraint. Secondly, God's humility is manifested in our story in Jesus' patience from verse 5 to verse 12.

Linked to his humility is his patience. Do you know that when God appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai, the mountain shook?

I woke up this morning and I looked outside of my window and I saw the Constantinople mountains. It's such a beautiful sight. We've had such beautiful weather lately, haven't we, in Cape Town? I thought about what it would be like if I woke up and I got out of bed and I got in my car to come to St.

Mark's and the mountains started to shake. Imagine how terrifying and awesome that must be. God appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai.

The mountain shook and there was thunder, smoke and fire. fire. The mountain became the temple of God's presence.

[ 19 : 31 ] God's presence was there. God's holy and glorious presence was there. And so God said to the people at the foot of the mountain in Exodus chapter 19, put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it.

Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. God is a mighty and a holy God. We must not take this God lightly, folks.

Then we look at Exodus 20 from verse 18 to verse 19. When the people, the Bible says, saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear.

They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

Imagine that God emptying himself of all of his scariness, becoming a man, the God of Mount Sinai, reclining around a central table with his disciples and then getting up and washing their feet.

[ 20 : 47 ] What a magnificent picture of God's gentleness and his patience. He's a fearsome God. The notion of Israelites going up the mountain and putting their arms around God is unspeakable.

They were terrified of his voice. They didn't even want to go near the mountain. And this is the God who embraced children in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the God who touched lepers and the broken and the needy. How does the preacher even begin to try and do justice to such a God and such a gospel?

Now let's have a look at how Jesus deals with Peter. Let's have a look at Jesus' patience. You know, some years ago in my own ministry, after one of my sermons, somebody in my congregation just handed me an envelope.

I never thought too much of it. I thanked him. This chap had been attending my church for some years. He was very, very quiet. He was always smiling and pleasant.

[ 22 : 01 ] One day he just handed me this letter and I put it in my pocket. Later on that night I read it. I opened it and I read it. And it was probably the most shocking, harsh, cruel letter I'd ever received.

I realised later on that this particular chap had some problems, psychological problems, but I didn't realise that at the time. The letter was just filled with hate and rage, accused me of all kinds of untrue things.

It really, really shocked me. But you know what shocked me even more? Was how angry I was with him. out of nowhere.

You know what I'm talking about because we've all been there. If you're going to go into a meeting with a difficult person, you know what to expect and so you're emotionally prepared. But it is when these kind of incidents occur, when somebody just comes out of the blue and climbs into you as it were and you're not ready for it.

Well I wasn't ready for this letter and I was, as a Christian, I was shocked at my own anger. I just didn't know where this anger came from.

[ 23 : 17 ] I was so angry that I had to actually take a week just to process everything and calm down before I could sit down with him and with my warden and resolve the problem. Do you know what I learned from working through that letter?

I learned that I could never ever be the saviour of the world. Neither could any other human being be the saviour of the world because we just don't have sufficient humility, patience, self-restraint and grace.

We just don't have it in us. Thank God Muhammad is not the saviour of the world. Muhammad was a murderer and a thief. Imagine having to trust in Muhammad for your salvation.

And not just Muhammad, any other human being. And yet I consider God's patience manifested here in his son.

So kneeling behind his disciples, he starts to wash their feet. You can understand their shock vocalized by Peter. Now, let's see what Peter says. He comes to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet?

[ 24 : 27 ] And Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I'm doing, but later on you'll understand. No, said Peter, you'll never wash my feet. It's typical Peter, isn't it? Foot-in-mouth disease. It's typical Peter.

He speaks before he thinks. He's like so many of us. Jesus, you'll never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. I thought about those words in that little conversation again this week and I thought to myself, Jesus has all power, all knowledge, all wisdom.

He's the God who created the world. He's the God who caused Mount Sinai to shake. And now he's sitting at this dinner table with this oath. here you've got Peter trying to correct Jesus.

And I looked at the passage again and I was absolutely amazed. I was blown away by the patience, the patience of our Saviour, the gentleness and compassion for Peter's silly, sinful humanity.

And of course yours. It doesn't matter how silly we are, how much we put our foot in it, when we come to him, he reaches out to us and he loves us.

[ 25 : 43 ] The hands that fondled children touched lepers and washed our feet. The hands of the God of Sinai, there he is in the person of Jesus Christ and he's gently correcting Peter.

What a wonderful picture. Consider, by the way, this little snapshot from our story in verse 25. Jesus says, somebody's going to betray me.

Peter says to John, the beloved disciple, who is it? Ask him. Now they're all reclining around the central table. Remember, this is the ancient Near East.

In those days, you didn't sit up right, you would recline. So everybody would be on these reclining couches and they would probably recline like this on the left hand and the right hand would be used to eat and the couches, no doubt, would be staggered around the table.

So it's quite normal, quite natural for the beloved disciple on his left hand just to lean back onto Jesus' breast, to Jesus' chest and ask him, who is it?

[ 26 : 54 ] what an amazing little cameo, leaning onto the breast of the Saviour with that beautiful intimate moment and asking him, hey, who's it going to be?

I don't even think as men we would be comfortable with that kind of intimacy. intimacy. Just wonder whether there's a guy sitting next to you and if you asked him a question, if I just leaned over and put my head on Alan Hodgson's breast, I don't think Alan would regard that as appropriate.

All right? But joking aside, consider that for a moment. Consider the power of what our writer is trying to show us in the passage.

that we have that kind of intimacy with the God of Mount Sinai, the God of the creation, the Saviour who has all power.

What a wonderful picture of a beloved disciple leaning back on the very chest, the very breast of the Son of God. Pictures for us, doesn't it? The love and the intimacy that we can have in Jesus and the extent to which the Creator is willing to go and becoming a man to save us.

[ 28 : 23 ] By the way, why does Jesus say to Peter, if I do not wash you, you have no part of me, in verse 8? Well, the answer, of course, is the cross. He says, you do not understand now what I am doing, but after the cross, in other words, you will understand.

Because the foot-washing session points us to what happens on the cross, where Jesus cleansed us of all of our sins. In other words, in a manner far exceeding that of the foot-washing session, God's love is most manifest in his humility, his patience, his restraint, his self-control and gentleness on the cross.

What did they shout at him when they marched by as he was dying for our sins? Come off the cross and we'll believe you. Come off the cross and we'll trust in you. Thank God he didn't.

So as we close, in conclusion, you will observe that this idea of understanding, you do not understand now, but later you will understand.

This idea of understanding or not understanding of what Jesus is doing appears in our text twice. Look at verse 7. Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.

[ 29 : 41 ] And then we read, 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. John 13 verse 12.

John is writing here and as he writes, he records Jesus' acts very carefully to teach us something important about him. The first thing we need to understand is that we need to be washed by him in the cross.

cross. The cross is critically necessary. In fact, it's only after the event of the cross and the arrival of the spirit that we will truly understand the significance of Jesus' ministry.

But of course, that's the challenge that our writer presents to us. Do you truly understand what's happening in the story?

Of course, to understand here in our Bible story refers to something more than just bare comprehension of mere facts or what we might call intellectual assent.

[ 30 : 42 ] I believe that Jan van Riebeck landed on the Cape about 400 years ago, but I'm not trusting in Jan van Riebeck for my eternal life, am I? No, I hope not. You see, to understand here, as Jesus challenges us, do you understand, is to truly perceive the real significance of his humility.

His life and his death, to see beneath the surface of things. Let me illustrate, I grew up in a home as a child where music was always in the background. I've always been a musical person, I've always enjoyed as a child, I always enjoyed a musical home, but my parents were not classical music people.

They listened to pop, they listened to jazz, I don't know what you listen to, maybe you listen to R&B; or rap, we all have our own particular taste. But as I grew up, I instinctively realised that classical music was somehow fundamental important, even though I didn't really understand it.

But a great many people I admired and respected found classical music to be enormously fulfilling. So once I left home, I forced myself to start listening to classical music, I started with light material, some Vivaldi, and of course initially I didn't really understand it, I didn't get the point.

But I persisted, I persisted slowly. And as I listened, over a period of time, its depth and its spiritual beauty began to dawn on me.

[ 32 : 06 ] But more than this, as most lovers of great music will tell you, that to truly understand great music is not merely to hear it, to recognise its sounds or its notes or its facts, as it were, but it is to be changed by it.

Great music changes the heart and the soul. It is to be transformed by it in a manner that transcends or even defies description. To listen to great music over time brings the deep and the moving realisation that one is changed by it.

Now this illustration, this analogy in a very inadequate manner illustrates what Jesus means by understanding the gospel, understanding the full power of the humility of God, understanding precisely what it means to appreciate the humility of God coming down as a man and washing us on the cross.

It's not simply to acknowledge the facts of the gospel. It's not simply to acknowledge the reality that Jesus exists. It's to go far beyond that.

It is to be changed by the facts. It is to be changed ultimately by the Spirit of God, changed by the facts themselves. Now we read in John 13 and verse 14, now that I, says Jesus your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

[ 33 : 36 ] Now it's not that Jesus gave up his divinity to wash their feet. It's precisely because he is divine that he washed their feet. But how does this gospel change us?

If I'm suggesting that to understand the gospel is to be changed by the gospel, what does that mean? Well, of course, on one level it does mean that we will wash the feet of others. Perhaps for some churches, yes, we should literally wash the feet of one another.

But what John means here is something far more profound. It means that we will employ whatever gifts, whatever power, whatever authority we have been given by God to serve others and not ourselves, just as Jesus does in this passage.

As parents, as men, as women, as people with authority in the workplace, as people with power and authority in the home, we don't use that power and authority to hurt others, but to rather lift other people up.

But in conclusion, there's also a terrible unspoken warning in the account as well. You see, the question is, is it possible to reject such grace?

[ 34 : 46 ] Such unprecedented love, gentleness and humility? That's the question, is it not? Can anyone reject this unprecedented magnificent display of forgiveness and love?

Surely not. And yet in the story, we must also focus on the tragedy of Judas. Judas, because Judas teaches us incredibly it is possible for people to know the gospel and yet refuse to bow the knee to such a savior.

Such love, such humility, such gentleness to quietly go on with one's life as if this gesture of love never happened.

judgment. I wonder whether or not that is actually true of your life. Judas was a church going man. He was happy to sit at the savior's table, happy to be part of the fellowship of the disciples, but of course deep down in his heart he worshipped himself.

It was all superficial. Deep down inside his heart he rejected the call of Christ on his life.

[ 36 : 14 ] If it was possible for him, it's possible for you. So in conclusion, consider two things. First of all, Jesus knows all of us.

The God of power, the God who knows all things, knows you. We can't fool him. And secondly, like Judas, to reject this manner of love, this unprecedented gesture from God, this patience, this level of humility, is to render yourself without hope for eternal life.



The Bible tells us that we will be held accountable for the knowledge we are given. It's impossible for those of us who have once been enlightened like Judas by the truth of the gesture of God's love and humility in the gospel, for those who have tasted the heavenly gift, for those who have been coming to church to some extent at least, shared in the Holy Spirit, and yet who persistently and rebelliously throughout their lives reject such love.

It is impossible for those to be brought back to repentance. That's what the letter to the Hebrews tells us in Hebrews chapter 6. And so this passage would have us think deeply about our own lives.

In the light of the humility of God, God, perhaps you need to repent today.

[ 37 : 59 ] Amen. Let's pray together. Let's bow our heads for a few moments. Perhaps you need to ponder your own life. Perhaps you've not fully come to appreciate the love and the humility of God extended to you in Jesus Christ.

perhaps you've never asked him to wash you. Our Father, as our heads are bowed before you this morning, we are in awe at the love and the humility of Jesus.

Your love, your restraint, and your patience expressed to us in the person of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, as we look back on our lives, for those of us who are believers, we are filled with gratitude and thankfulness that you have been so gentle with us.

You do not treat us as our sins deserve. We want to bow before you this morning and thank you for Jesus. Thank you for your patience, Lord. Father, I also pray for those of us here perhaps today who have never really reached out to Jesus.

Just think about that person in the congregation this morning, seated at the table, and perhaps you reaching out to them, reaching out to them with fellowship and with love and forgiveness.

[ 39 : 24 ] Lord, soften that person's heart. May they not leave this church as Judas did with darkness and rebellion in their hearts.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.