

Pick Up Your Towel

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[0 : 00] All right, church, are you ready for this? Let's see if we can get it up on the screen just by way of reminder.

! God gives. We give back. How do we give back? When it is open to God's love. That's right. All right, we have been studying this concept in this series on generosity.

And really the whole point of this is we want your money. Right? That was a trick question. The answer is no. That is not the whole point of this at all. If that is what you have been taking away, then I got to tell you, you're just not quite paying attention very well.

So what I want to draw us to today is Matthew chapter 20. Would you go to Matthew chapter 20? As you're turning there, today's topic is this.

Pick up your towel. Can you take me to the next slide? Because this one's not working right now. There we go.

[1 : 09] Thank you all. I'm going to flip this and see if that does any better. Pick up your towel. Anybody got a towel laying nearby you? No? No?

Well, I guess we're out of luck then. Nobody's grabbing their towel today. Somebody's got a towel. Yes! Jaylee had a towel. Is that a towel or a blanket? By the way, hi, Jaylee.

Look at it. We have so many people back from college, from out of town, coming in from Pioneer Union. It is awesome. So great to see some of you around. Matthew chapter 20.

While you are turning there, some of you have already found it. That's fine. I want to share just a little story about my college exploits. And back in college, I was, well, let's just say I had a very prestigious athletic career.

I don't understand why some people immediately laughed at that. Actually, yes, I was the water boy and the equipment manager.

[2 : 16] It was a dual role. I got to provide water, Gatorade, and wash the towels. It was great. Got to pick up a lot of dirty towels. It was fantastic.

Did a lot of dirty laundry. Did a lot of mixing Gatorade and had my own special mix. Did you know it was actually Powerade? We couldn't afford Gatorade. Listen, did you know that if you mix lemon-lime Powerade with mountain blast Powerade, it tastes really good.

It comes out green. It's fantastic. The guys called it squirrel juice. It's a long story. Don't ask. All right. Anyway, so yes, I was a very, very high-level athlete such that I washed the towels.

But let me tell you, if I hadn't been there, that team would have been up a creek, man. I did it for the guys' basketball team. I did it for the guys' soccer team.

And that was it. But look, those teams would have failed even more than they did on the field and court had I not been their manager.

[3 : 27] We had fun. We picked up a lot of towels. But you know, the funny thing is, if you go into any professional team or high-level college team, probably saw a lot of college football yesterday.

If you got home in between Pioneer Union events at all. And there, of course, the NFL is playing today. If you walk in and you take away all the equipment staff from those teams, those high-level athletes wouldn't know what to do, man.

It'd be like, how come nobody washed my towel? How come my locker doesn't smell like lavender like usual? We got some spoiled athletes out there today.

Look, if you took away the whole equipment staff from all these programs, it would be a whole different ballgame. That team would not be in the right headspace. They'd be wearing dirty uniforms.

It would not be any fun at all. Truth is, nobody's ever going to interview the towel guy. But he's very essential to the operation of a team.

[4 : 32] Now, look, we're having a little fun with it. But the truth is, you've experienced this too. How many of you remember COVID when they quit cleaning hotel rooms? And they just stopped that.

And some of them haven't started back yet. And I'm pretty sure COVID just gave them an excuse. They were already not cleaning.

Look, the truth is, when you go and you stay in a hotel and you throw the towel on the floor, what does that mean? It's dirty.

You want it to be washed, right? If you hang it up, that means you're going to hold on to it. By the way, that's great. I don't think most of you throw the towel on the floor at your own home and then just expect it to magically be washed.

Maybe some of you do. Some of the wives are like, yes, they do. They do do that. It's not right. The truth is, we don't think about these little menial things.

[5 : 30] Towels don't seem very important. But in Matthew chapter 20 and then over in John chapter 13, towels are very important.

So I gave you a little sneak peek. If you want to stick a finger in John 13 or maybe if you've got one of these little ribbon bookmarks, you can put one there. We're going to go there in just a minute. But first, Matthew chapter 20, we've been talking about generosity.

And any time you're going to study a subject from the Bible, you've got to go straight to see what Jesus had to say about it first. And so Jesus gave us a lot of teachings on generosity.

And we've been looking at them for the last few weeks. And we're going to continue today from this new angle, which is pick up your towel and serve. Matthew 20 and verse 28, the highlight verse there in this passage said, The Son of Man came not to, what does that say?

Be served, but to serve others. He didn't come as high and holy and important as He is. He didn't come to receive all that honor and be served.

[6 : 44] He came to serve others. So let's look at Matthew chapter 20, beginning in verse 25. By the way, have y'all noticed that we've been in Matthew quite a bit of this year?

Going back to the very beginning of the year and throughout the year, we've spent more Sundays in the gospel of Matthew than any other book combined from all the other Sundays.

So we're really diving into this gospel and seeing what Jesus has to teach us from it. Verse 25. You know, Jesus says, that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.

Those in high positions act as tyrants over them. It must not be like that among you. So if you're going to follow me, that's not how you act.

You want to act like that, go follow them. My way is different. On the contrary, he says in verse 26, Whoever wants to become great among you must be your what?

[7 : 57] Servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. We're going even a little deeper, a little harsher. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Everybody wants the interview. Everybody wants the paycheck. Everybody wants the notoriety, the applause, the pats on the back. Nobody wants to pick up a towel.

Nobody wants to serve. But in the kingdom of God, the towel is the sign of true greatness.

This is an indispensable perspective on generous living. Going beyond ourselves. Going beyond what we would even want.

And picking up a towel to serve. So that's what we're talking about today. The world says, go get a title. Jesus says, go grab a towel.

[9 : 09] There is a distinct difference there, isn't there? Now this seems pretty obvious. But the problem is, it still doesn't drive us very often to go pick up a towel.

So, let's go to John chapter 13. I said we'd get there. John chapter 13. And we're going to look at another example where Jesus actually picked up a towel.

John chapter 13 and verse 3. For sake of time, I'm going to go ahead and read. Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands.

He had come from God. And he was going back to God. So he got up from supper. Laid aside his outer clothing. Took a towel. And tied it around himself.

Next he poured water into a basin. And began to wash his disciples' feet. And to dry them with a towel tied around him. Do you see what Jesus is doing here?

[10 : 12] He's stooping. Humbling himself. The Bible says Jesus literally stepped off of his heavenly throne. Took upon him the form of a mighty conquering king.

Right? No. Took upon him the form of a servant. Was made in the likeness of humble men. Just like you. And just like me.

And being found in fashion as a man. He humbled himself. He was obedient. Even to his death on the cross. He went all the way down to the bottom.

All the way down to death. To a sad, unfortunate ending to his story on this earth. That's what Jesus did. We get to look back with the benefit of hindsight.

And say, no, no, no. That wasn't the end. He rose from the dead. Yeah, but nobody knew that. Even though he had said, I will tear this temple down. And build it back in three days.

[11:14] And they all thought he was talking about the temple in Jerusalem. And he was talking about his body. But even though we get to look back. Knowing the end of the story. To those who had walked with him.

They didn't even all get it. To those who had listened and heard him teach. And seen him do mighty miracles. But he was always poor. He never owned anything. He never had a permanent home. Came from humble beginnings. His life seemed to have a sad conclusion. That's what he endured. He didn't come down.

Riding a great white horse. And coming in as the conquering king. To free the Jewish people from Roman oppression. That's what they wanted. But it's not what he did.

Because he knew the secret. He knew that you and I must learn to live humbly. You and I must learn to knock ourselves down a few pegs.

[12:15] And be willing to pick up a towel and serve someone else. And so even here. Shortly before. His death.

He stoops. Washes his disciples dirty feet. Nasty from out there. Walking through. The dust and the dirt.

In those open sandals. And he washes them. And he dries them with the towel. What an act of service. And of course Peter.

Is fighting him every step of the way. No, no God. Don't do that. Don't do that. He said, well if I don't wash your feet. You can't be one of mine. That is the mark.

Of being a disciple of Jesus. He serves us. And then commissions us. To serve others. He humbled himself. Made himself the lowest of the low.

[13:13] So you and I could be saved. So we could be forgiven. And then he showed us. The pathway. The template. The model. The example. Of how to live. And it was that.

It was humbling yourself. And picking up a towel. So skip down now. To verse 12. When Jesus had washed their feet. And put on his outer clothing.

He reclined again. And said to them. Do you know what I have done for you? You call me teacher and Lord. And you're speaking rightly. Because that's what I am.

So if I. Your Lord. And your teacher. Have washed your feet. You think you guys also ought to wash each other's feet? What a powerful point.

He didn't just sit there. As we probably would have done. I would have gotten up here. And preached a sermon. On how we ought to serve each other. Jesus didn't preach a sermon.

[14:13] He actually did it. He actually got down there. And modeled it for them. And it was gross. And it was nasty. And there were a lot of them.

And his back probably hurt. By the time he was done. And over and over again. He washed their feet. And dried them with the towel. And he said.

You guys. Ought to serve each other. Like this. So. Number one. Serving. Is generosity. In action. Serving. Is generosity. In action. Do you understand? That we can say. That we'll be generous. And what is the first thing.

That comes to your mind. When somebody says. Generosity. Generosity. Set yourself apart. From what we've studied. In this series. All right.

[15:09] Just. Not thinking about. Biblical. Jesus. Generosity. But if somebody just said. Oh. He's a generous guy. What do you think. That means. Money. Right. They give. They give money away.

You can give money away. Without being generous. Have we gotten that. Through our heads by now. I'm still trying to get that. Through my head. You can give money away.

Without being generous. You can donate to charities. Without being generous. You can hand. A five dollar bill. Or a twenty dollar bill. To a homeless person. Without being generous.

What matters. Whether you're generous or not. Is the condition of your heart. The how. And the why. Jesus has always been. Far more concerned. With the how. And the why. Rather than the what. The what. Can change. The what. Will adapt. To different situations. The what. For you. Might be different.

[16:08] Than the what. For somebody else. But the how. And the why. Will be the same. Because that. Is the change. God makes. On the inside. That's choosing. The Jesus way.

All our life. He's been faithful. To us. We just heard. Heather and Jared. And the choir. Sing. All our life. He's been so good. He's been so. Generous.

To us. He wants to teach us. How to be generous. That involves. Action. That involves. Serving. That involves. Going beyond. Just writing. A check. That goes. Into the area. Of giving. Yourself. There's a truth here.

You can give. And we're talking. About money. You can give. Without making it. Personal. Can't you? Sometimes. It's easy.

[17:01] Just to cut a check. And get them. Off your doorstep. Sometimes. It's easier. Just to buy. The box. Of girl stout cookies. So they'll quit asking. Right? And then you eat them.

And you're like. Oh yeah. Those are delicious. After you've frozen. The thin mints. Because everybody knows. Thin mints. Are best frozen. If you haven't had that. You're welcome.

For the tip. So you can give. Without personally. Actually getting involved. But you can't serve. Without getting involved.

You can't serve. Without making it. Personal. Whether you're doing it. Begrudgingly. Even if you don't. Really want to be there. You know what often happens.

When you show up. And you serve. Anyway. The service. This changes your heart. It changes your want to. The feelings end up catching up. God just needed you to get your ugly mug out there.

[17:59] So he could use it. Right? It's been my experience at least. There's always a difference. There's always a difference. In how we look at other people.

And how Jesus looks at us. We judge people whether they're worthy of our service. Whether we approve of this particular cause.

Whatever it is. We have a high set of standards. Right? I don't know. I'm not sure what that person would do with the money. I don't know. What do they support?

What has that organization ever supported or given money to in their time? And I'm not saying we don't be responsible with what God's given to us. But listen. There's a difference in the mindset. We've been talking about this the last couple of weeks. Bounded set versus centered set. I'm not going to spend a long time on it. But I just want to remind you of it and bring it back in.

[18:56] We are often bounded set. We create these boundaries. Think about this circle. These lines. And whoever's on the inside. That's our crowd. And whoever's on the outside.

That's not our crowd. We don't affiliate with them. We don't associate with them. We don't want to be around them. They're not welcome here. That is often how we judge others.

Jesus says, no. It's not about the lines that you've set. Because the problem is everybody's lines are going to be different. Your boundaries are going to be different than mine.

And the person next to you. Maybe even your spouse. Maybe even your kids. You're going to have slightly different lines or boundaries. But listen. Jesus doesn't judge us that way.

He judges us whether we're moving toward him or away from him. It's all about Jesus. So you might be coming from up here or down here or over here or over here.

[19:53] But if you're moving toward Jesus, he's drawing you in. And if you're moving away from him, he's trying to get you back.

You might be inside those lines. But you might be moving away from Jesus. That is the condition of the heart. And that shows us whether we're generous.

And often that determines on who we'll serve. Usually we only want to serve people or do things for people that we get along with. That fit inside our lines.

Jesus says we're supposed to serve everybody. Even our enemies. That's the hard part. If you look across America today, it is as fractured, as divided as it's ever been.

And one side, by and large, sees the other side as enemies and vice versa. You know what Jesus says? Love them. Love your enemies.

[20:55] Do good to them. That's a hard thing. But it shows us not only whether we're generous, but if we're following Jesus. If we're actually moving toward him.

So, Romans 12 and verse 1. Paul talks about it. We see this teaching from Jesus. And then each Sunday we're able to find similar teaching from Paul.

Because he studied Jesus. And he had an encounter with Jesus. And he met Jesus. And Jesus guided his teaching. And so in Romans 12 and verse 1. Dear brothers and sisters. I plead with you to give your bodies to God.

That's not just writing a check. That's service. Those are action words. Give your bodies to God. Because of all he's done for you.

That's our motivation. That's our why. Because of what Jesus did for me. Because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. And if you don't know that story. Then stick around and anybody here will be happy to tell you.

[22 : 01] How Jesus hung on a cross. Gave up his life for your sin and for mine. And then didn't stay dead. He proved that he was God. By doing what he said and coming back to life.

God raised him from the dead. And now he's alive today. And offers forgiveness for your sin.

Cleansing from all your sin. Past, present, and future. And that's the gospel.

John 3.16 says, For God so loved the world, He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, will not have to pay for the punishment for your sin, but will have eternal life.

So he said, because of that, because of what God's done for you, let your bodies be a living and holy sacrifice. That's a scary word.

Sacrifice. How many of you have looked in the Old Testament and you've seen all the animal sacrifices written about in there? How many of you are glad we don't do animal sacrifices in the name of God today anymore?

[22 : 59] That's really good, right? It would be weird. They'd be calling us a cult. But we don't do that anymore. Because Jesus was the final sacrifice. And now He's saying, I don't need a dead sacrifice from you.

I need a living sacrifice from you. I need to offer, I need you to offer up your body alive and well. And useful for my purposes on earth because my purposes are higher and greater and better than your purposes.

And if you write over a blank check with your life to me, then I will take that check and do much better for it, with it, for you than you ever could on your own.

So let Him be a living and holy sacrifice. Not an own holy sacrifice. A holy set-apart sacrifice.

Saying, God, I'm setting this apart for you.

That's what makes it holy. It's not that you're perfect. It's not that you never mess up. It's not that you ever have an impure thought. It's not that you never do something that you wish you hadn't done five seconds later.

[24 : 08] Or said something that you wish you hadn't said. Maybe online. Yes, those are unholy, unrighteous things. But what makes it a holy sacrifice is when you offer it all up and you don't hold back.

Holding back makes it an unholy sacrifice. But when you say, God, here I am. As messy and messed up as it is.

I'm giving it to you. That's what makes it a living and holy sacrifice. And that's what He finds acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him.

Showing up at church on Sunday morning and singing, I will sing of the goodness of God. That's not the way to worship Him. That's a way to worship Him.

But if you're not willing to offer yourself and all your mess as a living and holy sacrifice to God, then those words are hollow.

[25 : 22] Those words aren't worship. They're just words. So this is the way to worship. Number two, and we're almost done.

God's kingdom grows when we grab our towels. Matthew chapter 5 and verse 16. Let your light shine before others. Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Did you catch the difference there? It doesn't say, let your light shine before others so they can see your good deeds and think what a great gal or guy you are. That's not what it's about.

It's about glorifying God. How does God get the glory? When we give Him the credit. When we do something for someone and say, you know, Jesus did everything for me, so I want to do whatever I can for you.

That's how God gets the credit and that's how they end up giving Him the glory. That's letting our light shine.

[26 : 33] Not just doing something for someone, but letting the light of Jesus shine through you. That's the difference. So, I want to share this with you.

The church doesn't grow on the gifts of a few, but on the service of many. It will take all of us letting our light shine to really see God's kingdom grow right here at First Baptist Henrietta.

It's not just going to take the gifts or the talent or the service of me, Jared, Megan, the committee leaders, the choir members, the ushers, the Sunday school teachers, the people who really get involved, right?

The people who are really committed. It's going to take all of us. It's going to take the service of many letting our light shine Monday through Saturday, not just on Sunday and not just on Wednesday night.

It's letting God change us and letting that change shine out as messy as it can be sometimes. But when God does something through us, we say, that's God in me.

[27 : 50] And then the longer we walk with Jesus, the less messy it gets because He changes us. He conforms us into His image.

So, God's kingdom grows when we grab our towels. What's the towel that you need to grab?

What's a task that God has for you that seems beneath you, seems like something you just don't want to do?

But that's a towel that you can grab and a service that you can do for God because of all He's done for us. What have we learned today? Number one, Jesus values willing service over self-importance.

Every time, self-importance will lead you further away from Jesus, not toward Him. You can be self-important and stay inside that circle of how people think Christians ought to be.

[28 : 57] But you can't be self-important and moving toward Jesus. It's impossible. So, what He wants to teach you instead is willing service. Number two, serving God doesn't usually look glamorous.

It usually looks like grabbing a towel. It usually looks like washing somebody's feet. It usually looks like going out of your way to do something for somebody else. It usually looks like seeing a need in the church and saying, you know what?

I'm going to step in and fill that gap. I'm going to step up out of my comfort zone because I'm not serving them. I'm serving God and God wants me to serve them.

And then number three, humbling ourselves can draw others to follow Jesus. When we pick up a towel, it says something to everybody else around us.

when we dress up nice and dare not say a bad word and we go around looking important and say, I don't miss a Sunday over there at First Baptist Church, man.

[30 : 03] That probably doesn't draw very many people to Jesus. What does draw people to Jesus is when we go out of our way to help them and we give God the credit for it.

humbling ourselves can literally draw other people into choosing to follow Jesus and that could get them out of an eternal hell, a punishment for their sin and into an eternal relationship with Jesus which will land them in heaven with God forever.

You can change someone's destiny. I can change someone's destiny. We can do it by humbling ourselves. You all know who this guy is?

What's that? Al. Well, yes, it is, I believe, an AI picture but that guy is a real guy who lived and is no longer alive. President John F. Kennedy many years ago toured NASA.

Everybody know what NASA is, right? Right? astronauts. JFK was touring NASA. It was pretty cool. This was the height of the space race.

[31 : 21] America was going to the moon. Everybody was excited. They were racing Russia to try to get there first. It's a lot of confidence in America and their space program and all that and everybody was, a lot of money was being thrown at it so JFK goes and tours NASA as the president and he's talking with all the important people and the scientists and the astronauts and everybody and then they're walking him through a hallway and he sees this guy.

He was a janitor and JFK trying to be a good leader, trying to notice the little people, he stops and he says, sir, what's your name and what do you do here?

And the guy gave his name. I think it was Roy something and he said, Mr. President, I'm putting a man on the moon. He was the janitor but he felt like he was putting a man on the moon. Why? Because if they didn't have the facility, then they wouldn't be able to send a man to the moon and if they didn't keep the facility clean, then it wouldn't be usable. He had done the math and he had figured out my job is essential to the mission. My job will help put someone on the moon.

[32 : 52] If they didn't have me, they couldn't do it. I really believe God wants to get that mindset in every one of us here today. You might look up at me who gets up here most Sundays and preaches.

You might look at Jared who leads the singing. You might look at Heather and the others in the choir who have these beautiful voices and they lead us in singing and they get more face time than most people. Maybe you're a child and you think of your Sunday school teacher, oh, they're the one, you know, that they're really getting it done.

Maybe you're thinking of the building and grounds committee that goes around and puts in such time and labor into this church keeping the property up and guiding us forward. The finance committee, the committee on committees, that's a thing.

All these different committees spend so much of their time but I promise you it's not just the people who sit around making important decisions. It's not just the people who actively are up in front of people on Sundays.

It's the people who pick up the trash in the pew or on the floor. It's the people who show up and pray when nobody else is praying. It's the people who stop and check on somebody who just seems like they're not themselves.

[34 : 14] It's the people who go over to somebody they don't recognize and introduce themselves and say, welcome, thank you for joining us today. That is what sends the man to the moon.

That is what builds God's kingdom on this earth. Let us not be another self-important First Baptist church in small town Texas.

There are plenty of them. Okay? And I'm not going to go around naming names. I wouldn't want to do that and I'd probably get it wrong. But y'all know I'm not wrong. We don't have to be that.

We can recognize that God needs every single one of us, myself included, to stop what we're doing and pick up a towel sometimes or grab a broom and sweep or speak a kind word to somebody else. Greatness in God's kingdom isn't found in grabbing a title. It's found in picking up a towel. When you change a baby's diaper in the nursery, what are you doing?

[35 : 23] You're actually building God's kingdom. kingdom. When you pick up trash in the pews, you're not just picking up trash, you're building God's kingdom. When you step out of your comfort zone and volunteer to help out in a kid's Sunday school class, you're not just helping a kid's Sunday school class, you're building God's kingdom.

When you click through the words on the computer up there so the screen changes on time for the songs, you're not just clicking a button, you're building God's kingdom.

kingdom. This is what I'm talking about when I say pick up a towel. So, we build God's kingdom when we pick up a towel.

How do we do that this week? Sign up for service. Sign up for service. You can go back, you can check in at the office, they'll give you a gazillion different ministries that you could sign up for.

Right now, I'll mention the sound deck up there. Harlan's up there clicking through the slides, Matt's up there at the sound deck, they need more people. We had somebody retire from after years of serving up there, they retired from that.

[36 : 30] We need somebody to take their place. We need to see this choir loft filled. We need more people involved in the children's ministry to specifically the nursery. There are ways right now today for you to pick up a towel.

So, sign up for service. Try it out. If God tells you it's a bad fit, try something else out. But try it out first. And let's see how it goes.

And number two, look for more opportunities. Don't just say, all right, I signed up to help with a kids class, now I'm done. Keep picking up a towel wherever you go.

Church, let's say it together. God gives. How do we give back? And so give us back. So let's pick up our towels. God, right now I pray that you would show us the towel you have for us to pick up.

You stopped what you were doing. You humbled yourself. You got down and you washed your disciples' feet. You dried them with the towel. Help us to be willing to go to that level for each other, for you, for those that you love and died for.

[37 : 42] We'll give you all the glory for it. We'll praise you. We'll see the change that you're making in us. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.