

Wash one another's feet as I have washed yours

January 2, 2021

John 13: 1-17 (ESV)

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Do you ever wonder where Jesus spent his time the days before he was crucified?

Jesus spent his time exclusively with his disciples, *preparing* them, *teaching* them, *encouraging* them, *warning* them, *comforting* them and *promising* them of His presence.

So today we begin a new series in the Gospel of John. I have titled this series '*Preparing for the Cross*'.

We will be spending the next twelve Sundays in John's Gospel in those chapters 13 through 16 where Jesus focuses completely on his disciples. So, from today through March 20, Lord willing, we will see what Jesus teaches his disciples and how this teaching applies to you and I.

Jesus also spent his last days praying. So, after this series we will look at the prayers of Jesus and then get ready for Good Friday and Easter. Lord willing, we will complete the Gospel of John by May 15.

For today, my message title is "*Wash one another's feet as I have washed yours*"

Here as John describes in this passage, Jesus is at the last supper with his disciples. Jesus *knows* that these are his last days on earth. Jesus *knows* he will have to go through extreme pain, suffering, humiliation, mocking, jeering, rejection and eventually crucifixion and death. He also *knows* his own disciples will abandon him when he would be arrested. Jesus also *knows* that one of his own will betray him. However, Jesus know something more – that all these events are according to the Father's plan. Jesus came from God and is going back to God. (Verse 3).

And in the three and half years of his public ministry, he gathered these twelve disciples, he taught them, he lived with them, he modeled a faithful life for them. And now, all this was coming to an end. Jesus knew these were the days he was sent to earth for – to undergo humiliation and die a cruel death.

You know I heard a leader from another faith say this about Jesus. This man calls himself a yogi, someone who is a master of yoga. This man said that Jesus is not a picture of a successful person because he died so young. It seemed to me he was mocking the suffering and death of Jesus.

And yet, in verse 1, we see the faithfulness of Jesus until the end.

Jesus loved his own till the end. Other translations say "Jesus loved his own to the uttermost".

You can give to others when things are working well, when you have resources in your hand. But what if there is a death sentence right around the corner? What would come out of such a person who is going

through a trial? Love comes out from Jesus.

So today for our first part in this discipleship series – Jesus models and teaches his disciples something extraordinary. Something that we ought to do as well.

4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Peter is shocked at what Jesus does. Peter has been watching Jesus washing the feet of his fellow disciples. And by the time Jesus comes to him, Peter's attitude is one of *respectful revulsion*. Jesus called Peter to be one of his first disciples arguably the leader among the twelve. Peter has been walking with Jesus for three some years now. Peter has seen the wonders of God through the hands of Jesus. Peter honors Jesus too much for him to do such a thing. Peter called Jesus Master and Lord. Lords usually don't do such things. You don't see the President or the Governor calling for a meeting to clean the shoes of their staff members. But this is Jesus, the Son of God, touching, washing and wiping the dirty stinky feet of these disciples. They have been walking down the dusty roads of Galilee and Jerusalem. And Peter also saw Mary anointing the feet of Jesus. Maybe that's what needs to happen. Just like Mary, Peter ought to wash the feet of Jesus. Not Jesus washing Peter's feet. So, Peter objects to this act of washing his feet is right in what he said "You shall never wash my feet". The literal translation is emphatic that he actually says "*You shall not wash my feet in this age*". It's like saying "not in a thousand years you will wash my feet".

But Jesus says something to Peter that he will remember and you must remember as well.

Verse 8 – "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me"

What does Jesus mean?

Jesus must wash your sin away for you to belong to him.

Illustration: I remember taking a lighter color shirt to the cleaners. I had a small stain on it. It was noticeable but tough to get rid of. So my hope was the cleaners would take the stain off. But when I picked up the shirt, the cleaners said they could not get the stain off. Similarly, the stain of our sin cannot be removed by self-effort or by anyone else.

Proverbs 30:12 tells us that "*There are those who are wise in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth*".

During the prophet Jeremiah's time, the people of Israel abandoned and rebelled against God. Their sin was so grave that God tells them about their condition in chapter 2 verse 22 "*Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me*". Jeremiah 2:22

Job, who was called *blameless* by God asks "*how can a person be declared innocent in God's sight?*". "*Even if I were to wash myself with soap and clean my hands with lye,³¹ you would plunge me into a muddy ditch, and my own filthy clothing would hate me.*"

Job 9:2,30-31 (NLT)

But a true disciple of Jesus is someone who has come to the sober reality of *acknowledging* and *confessing* sin before God. That's the first step.

Psalm 69:5 gives us a picture of one who acknowledges his or her need before God. *“O God you know my folly the wrongs that I have done are not hidden from you”*.

The second step is to know who can clean our stains.

Only Jesus can wash away the stain of sin.

And we need a constant washing of our condition by Jesus. King David prays an earnest prayer to God this way, *“Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow”* Psalm 51:7

In the book of Revelation chapter 7, we see a picture of those standing around the throne of God and praising God. Verse 14 tells us *“they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”* Revelation 7:14

Do you have stains that you feel these are just so hard to remove in your life? Here is the answer – let the Word of God discern the thoughts and intentions of your heart, let the Holy Spirit convict you, let Jesus cleanse you, let Jesus wash you. The more we resist Jesus, the harder it is to remove the stain of sin. Jesus is the only spotless Savior who is capable of removing the hardest of stains. Peter pushed back on Jesus washing his feet. However, when Jesus says that he must wash him, otherwise Peter has no part in Jesus. Peter’s *turnaround* is immediate. Peter repents right away. This is what God wants of us.

Look at verses 9 through 11.

⁹ Simon Peter said to him, *“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”* ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, *“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”* ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, *“Not all of you are clean.”*

Peter is quick to acknowledge his need for Jesus. Now just to be clear Peter has not committed a grave sin. At least not yet. But Peter understood his dependence for Jesus. So, Peter blurts out. Jesus don’t just wash my feet. Wash my hands. Wash my head.

But Jesus again corrects and tells him what he means by washing of his feet. Washing of the feet is indicative of spiritual cleansing. The cleansing of the soul of its sin is more important than the ritual of feet washing. And you can go through the motions without having any change or cleansing of the soul. And there was one among this group just like that. Judas went through the motions. He was a thief. He played this part as if he was a disciple. But he was a devil’s agent all along. He had sold himself to the devil. And now he was plotting to betray Jesus. So, Judas is not clean. Meaning Judas has not confessed his need for Jesus. See the contrast between Peter and Judas?

So, Jesus finishes washing their and takes a seat again. Jesus then has a question for all his disciples. This is a question for you and I too.

Verses 12 through 17.

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, *“Do you understand what I have done to you?”* ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The “you” there is plural. Jesus is asking *“do you all understand what I have done for you?”*

Jesus will go to the cross and die for his own. He loved them to the end. And even on the cross, he kept loving them. He prayed for them. But here Jesus has a mission for them.

Jesus needs his disciples to serve another just he served them. In humility. Notice, this is not teaching on how to serve others but one another.

He is the Teacher. He is the Lord. He is the Head. He is able to cleanse us from our sin *first* and then Jesus models humble service to us. Why does he do this? Not to be spectators but to be participants.

The word “you also should do” is an important word. It means we are *obligated* to each other, we are *indebted* to each other. We *ought* to serve each other.

In verse 13, Jesus affirms the way the disciples called him. They called him Master and Lord. Jesus says they are right. He is Master and Lord of his disciples.

However, calling Lord and Master has implications.

Jesus himself said in Luke 6:46 “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?*”.

Our Lord Jesus is not someone who domineers and oppresses like the lords of this world. He is the Lord who lays down his life and serves. Jesus is the Lord of humility and servanthood.

Now I do want to point out a distinction between how Jesus wants us to serve versus how he served.

Jesus served by laying down his life, forgiving our sins, cleansing us from our stains and making us right with God.

So if there is anyone who has not yet availed of this offer, Jesus’s offer is still open. Today. Now. Jesus calls you to belong to him by being washed by him.

Jesus has also served by loving his own people to the end. Lowering himself not making much of himself even though Jesus is God-Incarnate. It is this example Jesus wants us to imitate.

We cannot cleanse each other the way Jesus cleanses us from our sin. That part Jesus does. But the part Jesus wants us to do is to serve each other as he has served us.

You are blessed if you do them.

Now, why does Jesus model and thus teach to his disciples?

You know there is saying that goes like this – “we stand on the shoulders of giants”. You and I have indirectly received the Good News because of the great sacrifices of these first disciples. Jesus sent them out into the world to spread the Gospel to all nations. There are giants in the spreading of the Gospel. They paid with their lives for the sake of the Gospel.

But you see, to Jesus, these disciples were just as human as you and I. They were once *disputing* and *arguing* about who was the better among them. Jesus knew this was going to be a problem if they continued to compete with each other. And I wonder if the disciples would have been successful if they did not understand this teaching from our Lord.

In the Gospel of Luke 9 and 22, we are given insight about this quarrel.

⁴⁶ *An **argument** arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸ and said to them, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.”* Luke 9

²⁴ *A **dispute** also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ And he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.”* Luke 22

Jesus modeled for them humble service. Jesus taught them to lift each other before they serve others and reach the world.

“Let every day be a day of humility; condescend to the all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow-creature, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate over their distress, receive their friendship, overlook the unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to the lowliest offices of the lowliest of mankind”. – William Law

I believe this teaching is crucial for us to thrive as a church this year. Jesus was showing his disciples to serve each other and *complement* each other rather than *compete* with each other.

The serving does not end with each other but begins there to serve others for the sake of Jesus.

Peter was appointed leader of the disciples. But you see Peter is also the one receiving more beatings and threats for preaching the Gospel. And, it is said that Peter was the one who asked to crucified upside down.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Wash one another as I have washed you. John 13:1-17

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. In verse 8, Jesus told Peter "*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me*". What does it mean to be part of Jesus Christ? Go around and share. See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 12:27, Romans 6:5-7

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. What do you believe is the *key* in imitating the example of Jesus and in relating to fellow believers in Christ?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: Is there anything that comes in your way of serving your fellow brother or sister? What will you do differently this year in light of Jesus' example and his instruction to his disciples?