

He Became a Servant

John 13:1-17

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Introduction: Do you know that there are some churches that wash one another's feet on a regular basis. The Catholic Church has a foot washing on the Thursday before Good Friday, but it is usually limited to Priests and Cardinals and Bishops. It is a ritual. Pope Francis recently shook up the Catholic Church by washing the feet of young criminals in a juvenile prison.

There are many denominations that practice foot washing at prescribed times...often in conjunction with a baptism or a communion. They usually wash one foot, demonstrating that it is only a ritual and not a true act of service to the recipient. If you knew you were going to take off your shoe and sock in public would you wash your feet before church and put on clean socks? Of Course. Ritual foot washing does not fulfill a practical purpose of actually cleaning dirty feet in our day. Nevertheless it is practiced by many Christians in our day and they base it entirely on the passage in John's gospel we are going to study today.

So the questions this morning are: Did Jesus teach us that we should wash one another's feet the same way He taught us to remember Him with bread and the cup? If not, then what was Jesus teaching us about Himself when He washed the disciple's feet? And finally what does Jesus want you to do with this knowledge? Let's start with the passage.

John 13:1-17 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would 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, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, ³ *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." ¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know 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, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

As believers we do not want to be ignoring or refusing to do something that Jesus taught you to do. We want to understand His purpose in washing the disciples feet and our responsibility in the matter.

To do that we want to look carefully at when it was done, what was done, where it was done, how it was done and then finally what Jesus said about it. At the end we will make some conclusions about our responsibility in it all. What does Christ want you to know and internalize this morning. I think our passage makes it clear.

State the Proposition. What is this text trying to teach and prove about God and Christ Jesus: That Although He is God and very great, He became a servant of others and not Himself.

State the idea from the text: Servant hood goes against human nature and needs to be taught and then embraced from the heart. No ritual can ever make you a humble servant. Luke tells us that during that last Passover an argument broke out among the disciples over which of them would be the greatest in the Kingdom.

Luke 22:24-27 ²⁴ And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. ²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' ²⁶ "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. ²⁷ "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

John does not record the institution of communion or the dispute, but this event clearly takes place on that night before the crucifixion. John, under inspiration give us the life lesson...the application of the teaching. Jesus does something to illustrate and actually resolve the questions of their greatness in the Kingdom.

When and Where was it done [1-2]

John 13:1-2 Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would 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, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him,

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father: The setting is just before the Passover which would have begun on Friday at sunset. Jesus needed to eat the final meal with His disciples on Thursday and this is what He was doing. The events that would follow that night with His mock trial and murder at the hands of the Jews was all known to Him. He knew He would be returning to the place He came from...The right hand of the Father in heaven.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end: There is an interesting change of emphasis in John that starts with this passage. Until now Jesus has been preaching to crowds and healing crowds and teaching crowds. John does not record another thing Jesus says to crowds from this point forward. Instead Jesus cares for, teaches and loves His disciples whom He...not fate and not even they themselves has chosen. Jesus does have love for the lost but He has particular love for His Own. Jesus knows you are in the world. He knows you struggle with sin and brokenness in this fallen world...He will love you to the end. This is not just about the twelve. Jesus makes that clear enough in four more chapters.

John 17:20-21 ²⁰ "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

John 17:25-26 ²⁵ "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; ²⁶ and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him: Jesus was fully aware of what Judas was up to. He says so clearly just moments after the event that we will study.

John 13:18 ¹⁸ "I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but *it is* that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'

How it was done:

John 13:3-5 ³ *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,

Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands: Everything in creation is in the hands of this simple carpenter's son. He is the heir of Creation. Hebrews observes that God....

Hebrews 1:2-3 ² has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Jesus knew all this. He knows that in 18 hours He will die. 72 hours after that He will be alive again in His Glorified and Immortal body. 50 days after He will ascent to His rightful place at the right hand of the Father just as John observed in Revelation Five....

Revelation 5:13 ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits

on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

He had come forth from God and was going back to God: This seems like the perfect time to assert His authority and power. He is literally within sight of His glory. BUT...He loves His disciples....He love You! So what He does defies the logic and nature of Men. Can you imagine the president of the United States parking the cars for the dignitaries at a State dinner and then rushing inside so that he could take their coats and serve their food to them? How about a CEO who would come down to his employees and clean their restrooms and then make lunch for them? These are tasks that we would say are...."BENEATH HIM!"

What was about to happen was done in full knowledge of who He was and what His destiny was. He had nothing to gain from it. He was leaving them. He was going back to heaven. He would not be King at this time but in the distant future. How does Jesus do this? With full knowledge and more importantly...In Love. He did it because He loved His Own. What did He do....?

What was done [3-5]

John 13:4-5 ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Jesus got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself: In a matter of a few moments, He transforms Himself from a guest...no actually the Master of the Dinner [the one hosting the dinner] to the lowest servant of the household. Foot washing was done by the least important person in the household. If you had servants it would be the least worthy servant. If you did not have them then it might be the youngest child. It was never, ever done by the master of the house. It was beneath him.

Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded: Jesus prepared Himself exactly the way this lowly servant would have. He takes off his outer garment. This would be like taking off your jacket if you were dressed in a suit. He takes a long towel and ties it around his waist and He gets on His knees in front of His disciples....on the floor...The Lord of Creation...The Sovereign Son of the Sovereign God and He crawls from disciple to disciple washing the sweat and road dirt off their feet. That was what was done.

A few days before this Mary did something similar in Bethany.

John 12:3 ³ Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

She humiliated herself in public. She was a wealthy woman of standing in this community and yet she crawled around on the floor like a common slave and even let down her long hair to wipe the feet of Jesus.

Why was it done [6-11]

John 13:6-11 ⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." ¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?": This is exactly the question that Peter was asking himself. Remember...Peter. Peter knew who Jesus was. God the Father had revealed it plainly to Peter.

Matthew 16:15-17 ¹⁵ *Jesus* said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.": Now...of all the things Jesus said, this one most reveals that this is not a ritual. If it is a ritual then there is nothing to realize. Jesus is washing Peter's feet. That is what this is about. You get a towel and some water and you wash one another's feet, BUT....Jesus says, "what I do you do not realize now, but you will understand later."

Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!": As one commentator put it, "Peter is humble enough to see the incongruity of Christ's action, yet proud enough to dictate to his Master"

Ladies...If Jesus came to your house for dinner, would you ask Him to prepare the meal, tidy up the house and then set the table? THIS IS UNTHINKABLE! You would probably fight him if He tried to do this.

Men if Jesus came to your work place would you let Him do all your work for the day while you sat in the shade and drank your favorite beverage and ate snacks. Would you let Him insist that you received the pay after He had done all the work? THIS IS UNTHINKABLE!

BUT....It explains perfectly the response of Peter to Jesus. Peter would have probably washed Jesus' feet gladly that night. The problem as we have already seen from the

dispute over greatness in Luke is....that he would not have washed the feet of his brothers.

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.": Have you ever **not** understood something God says in the Scripture? Then welcome to the club. Jesus has told Peter and the others that they did not understand what He was doing. But Peter still thinks he does. A lot of what goes on in your life...that you were always so sure about and even smug is designed to get you to this place. The place is simple. God knows what is going on and understands it perfectly....You....NOT SO MUCH! Referring to this washing, **Leon Morris** explains it this way...

"In the context it must refer to the washing of the feet. Unless Peter submits to the feet-washing he may not eat with Jesus. But Jesus means more. A literal washing of the feet is not necessary before a man can be a Christian. The words point us to a washing free from sin which only Christ can give. Apart from this a man will have no part in Christ."

But Jesus is not telling Peter that he needs "foot-washing to be saved. Remember...Jesus said that Peter did not realize what Christ was doing on His knees before him. In just two verses Jesus says to Peter....before He washes his feet...."you are clean!"

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.": Still missing the point Peter swings his pendulum as far in the other direction as possible. "If feet washing is what it takes to be saved [wrong!] then a complete head to toe bath will be even better." Morris comments again,

"Peter may not have met the words to be taken literally, but as a wholehearted renunciation of his previous refusal to be washed at all. But we should not overlook the fact that the answer is still the product of self-will. Peter is reluctant to let Jesus do what He wants. He prefers to dictate the terms."

Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean: Peter....Peter.....Peter.....This is not about you. It is not about you getting clean. YOU ARE CLEAN. It is about others. Not what is done to you or for you, but what you do to and for others. Remember this is the practical follow-up lesson to the dispute over their greatness that erupted during the Last Supper.

You are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean.": Again...Jesus was in the know. He knew Judas' heart the way He knows everything else in the universe. He know our thoughts and heart this same way. You don't need to hide your anguish and faithlessness from God. You need to approach Him with it. You need to take it to Him and give it to Him. Peter did this....Judas did not. God already discerns your thoughts and motives. He will reveal them to you if you will go to the Scriptures with humility and desire.

Hebrews 4:12-13 ¹² For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And there is no

creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

CONCLUSION...What Jesus said about it [12-17]

John 13:12-17 ¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know 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, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?": Clearly they did not. If this was a ritual to be performed by every generation of believers this would have been an irrelevant question and they would have responded...."uhhh....You washed our feet?"

"You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am: Jesus is our Teacher or Rabbi and He is also our Lord and Master. When we call Him this we are spot on. But this is the problem. The disciples are fighting about their own greatness. They are on the verge of the first church split in history and there are only 12 of them there. They have not understood what Jesus was doing on the earth and therefore they did not understand what they should be doing. This is why Christian's fight. They either do not know anything about the gospel that Jesus is about to make a reality or they just think it is about them and their needs. Their salvation! Their position! Their importance!

"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.: Jesus only has this one last opportunity to teach them. They are still fighting about their own standing the night before He will die and return to heaven. This is the practical application to what He has just told them. "The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant."

For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you: In one ear and out the other....so let me show you. It means that you actually do acts of physical service for one another. It is how you love one another. It is how I have served you. I am not instituting a ritual, I am showing you what it looks like to love one another and to serve one another.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him: Jesus is about to perform the ultimate act of service in the history of creation. There has never been, nor never will be anything like it. The Cross defines and reveals love. It makes the Love of God real. Any one can say they love! God could have left us with the first half of John 3:16. God so loved the world! A nice thought as any divorced person can tell you. Where is the love? Show me the proof!

John 3:16-17 ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them": What Things? That you are not greater than your Master! This is the answer to almost every interpersonal problem we face. Should we forgive an offense? Should we continue to serve an ungrateful child or spouse? Should we put away our own preferences in favor of someone else's? Should we show grace to someone who has sinned against God? Should we love someone who does not return our love? I cannot think of a single human relationship question that is not answered at the Cross and in this manner.

This is called "living in the Gospel" or "Preaching the Gospel to yourself." It leads to unspeakable blessing and peace of heart and soul. It is selflessness that comes from loving Christ more than we love ourselves. It is the heart of the Gospel, the only way to experience Joy in a fallen world and the surest path to Loving Christ.

John 15:10-14 ¹⁰ "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full. ¹² "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. ¹³ "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ "You are My friends if you do what I command you.