

JESUS WASHES HIS DISCIPLES' FEET

John 13:1-17

Key Verse: 13:8

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

John chapters 13-16 are called “the upper room dialogues.” Just before his crucifixion, Jesus gives his disciples important instructions, warnings and promises. In chapter 13, Jesus teaches us true humility and the love of God. He washes his disciples' feet. He commands us to love one another. In sum, this chapter is about love. May God help us to know Jesus' love so that we may love one another!

I. JESUS LOVED THEM TO THE END (1-2)

Look at verse 1. *“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* Jesus knew that the time of his departure had arrived. Soon, he would go through painful betrayal, torture, beating and death on the cross. Jesus was in great anguish at the thought of his suffering. In this situation, any person would be preoccupied with his problem. But what was on Jesus' mind?

Look at verse 1b. *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* His disciples were on his mind. Jesus was concerned about their spiritual condition. At this moment of anguish, “he loved them to the end.” What an amazing and beautiful description of Jesus' love that John recorded here for us! Jesus loved his disciples to the end.

What does it mean Jesus loved them to the end? Jesus loved them from the beginning to the end. His love for them never changed. Jesus loved them even though his time of crucifixion was approaching and he knew they would abandon him. Hebrews 13:8 says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* The love of Jesus is unchanging. His love lasts forever.

Love is like oxygen to a human soul. Without love, life would be so unsatisfying and even suffocating. Love is the theme of many movies and songs we watch and sing. But human love is often conditional and self-centered. Human love is based on physical emotions that are prone to change. To see what people are singing about love, I googled Lady Gaga with the word “love.” Her song “Love Game” came up. Its lyrics go something like: “I’m on a mission, And it involves some heavy touchin’ yeah. You’ve indicated your interest, I’m educated in sex, yes. And now I want it bad, Want it bad. A love game, A love game.” Many young people today talk about love in terms of emotional attachment or physical attraction to someone. But this kind of love is conditional and superficial. If two people get married based on this kind of love, their union cannot last long because emotions change over time. People exchange their vows of love at their wedding,

promising to love each other “till death do them part.” But 50% of marriages end in divorce, often leaving their young children in confusion and sorrow.

But the love of Jesus is different. The love of God is not conditional or temporary. Jesus knew that one of his disciples would betray him, selling him for 30 pieces of silver. He also knew that his top disciple would deny him three times. He knew that all of them would abandon him on the night of his arrest. But he still loved them. He loved them to the end.

There are people who cry at night when they are alone. Most of them are sorrowful because they feel unloved. There are many problems facing mankind. But we can reduce them to two most fundamental problems. One is the sin problem. Without having the sin problem solved, we are condemned to eternal death. We are destined to suffer eternally in hell. Jesus came to solve this problem for us. He came to die on the cross to wash away all our sins with his blood. The other problem is love—the lack of it. Our life is empty without love, especially the love of God. Jesus came to this world to show the unchanging, unconditional, and unfailing love of God. John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus loves us to the end. Without his love, our life is without a true meaning or a purpose. Without Jesus in our lives, this world is like traveling through wilderness without someone to hold our hand.

Look at verse 2a. “*The evening meal was in progress ...*” This was the Last Supper. Jesus’ disciples were always hungry. They rarely had regular hot meal. So they were excited to have the supper together. They had a whole upper room to themselves, prepared for them to have the Passover meal with Jesus. However, they did not realize a deep meaning of the Last Supper, and that the hour had come for Jesus to die on the cross as the Lamb of God.

This joyful occasion was interrupted by Satan. Look at verse 2b. “*... and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.*” Judas had followed Jesus for more than three years. He experienced the miracles of Jesus firsthand. He saw Jesus’ compassionate heart toward sinners. He ate with Jesus, slept with Jesus and traveled with Jesus. Yet Judas did not commit his life to the Lord. He followed Jesus but his heart was somewhere else. He did not repent his sins. He did not give up his selfish ambition, especially his love for money. When Jesus talked about his suffering and death, Judas began to look for a way to get out. His uncommitted heart became an easy target for Satan. The devil whispered in his ears, “Judas, get out before it’s too late. There’s nothing you can gain by sticking with Jesus anymore.” We should earnestly pray, “Lord, help me not to be like Judas. Help our children not to be like Judas.” The impending betrayal by one of his own disciples must have caused a sharp pain in Jesus’ mind. But Jesus loved them to the end. He got up and did something to show them the nature of his love.

II. JESUS DEMONSTRATES THE LOVE OF GOD (3-11)

Verse 3 says that Jesus knew that the Father had already put all things under his power. Jesus also knew that after his crucifixion and resurrection he would return to God to sit on his right hand. It also meant that the time for him to be with his disciples was almost over. But they were still young spiritually. They still did not know the love of God. They did not know how to love each other. What did Jesus do to help them? Let's read verses 4-5. "*... so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*" In the middle of the dinner, Jesus got up and began to wash his disciples' feet. This was a totally unexpected thing to the disciples. They were shocked. They all stopped eating. So what does it mean that Jesus washed the dirty feet of his disciples? What does this mean to us today? I believe Jesus taught them (and us) two important things we must learn in order to be useful servants of God—humility and love.

First, humility. Washing someone else's feet was a servant's job. But Jesus, the Son of God, humbled himself and took the form of a servant. He began to wash his disciples' feet. St. Paul teaches us that Jesus' coming into this world itself was an act of humility (Php 2:1-8). The Son of God came to this world in the form of human. It was like a person becoming a cockroach. How could the Son of God become like one of us? But that's exactly what Jesus did. Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. Why did he have to do this? It was because sinful men could not make themselves holy to approach the holy God. We could not climb on a ladder to reach God. So God lowered himself to come to us. While on earth, Jesus humbly served all kinds of sinners. Once he met a sinful woman in Samaria. She lived an immoral life. She was lonely and thirsty. She was bitter and obnoxious. It wasn't easy for anyone to talk her. But Jesus approached her humbly, asking her a favor. He asked her, "Will you give me a drink?" It was the beginning of a wonderful and fruitful 1:1 Bible study between the two. Jesus also approached me when I was a sinner wandering around the dark alleys of my hometown, not knowing what to do with my life. He washed away all my sins with his precious blood.

What can we learn from Jesus who washed his disciples' feet? If we want to reach out to young people and share with them the truth of God, we must humble ourselves. At our campus meeting last week, Shep. Maria led a good discussion on humility. True humility is different from false humility. If you said to someone, "You are much better than I am," while thinking in your mind, "Actually I am much better than you are," then Jesus wouldn't call you a humble person. Instead, he would call you a hypocrite. Neither is humility about feeling low self-esteem or inferiority. True humility is to recognize our weaknesses before God and learn to depend on him. It is to lower ourselves and be willing to serve others, as Jesus did in this passage. Let us follow the ways of Jesus our Lord who lowered himself to serve sinners. Let us learn from Jesus how to be humble.

Second, love. Why did Jesus wash his disciples' feet, not their hands or faces? The feet

are a dirty and smelly part of the body. In Jesus' time, the roads were not clean as ours today. They were used by both humans and animals. They were littered with many debris and animal droppings. And people wore sandals, not sneakers. So their feet were dirty and smelly. And Jesus washed their feet. It was symbolic of what Jesus would do on the cross for you and me. Jesus washed the dirty part of our souls—the sins. God had created all of us in his own image. But sin came into this world, making us ugly. Think about how ugly we are when we are steeped with sins such as selfishness, pride, arrogance, envy, backstabbing, sexual immorality, lying, self-seeking, murders, rebellion against God, and so on. No soap or perfume can make our dirty sins go away. Only Jesus' blood can wash them away. Jesus loved his disciples to the end when he died on the cross to take away their sins. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

Look at verse 5. *After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.* Jesus washed their feet one by one, including even the feet of Judas Iscariot. When it was his turn, Simon Peter felt uneasy. He asked Jesus, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" (6) Peter thought it wasn't right for his teacher to wash his feet. He should be the one to wash Jesus' feet. He couldn't let his Master wash his dirty feet. He was also embarrassed because he had not washed his feet for several days.

What did Jesus say to Peter? Look at verse 7. *Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."* Jesus told him that there was a deep spiritual meaning in what he was doing. It was much more than making their feet smell good. Peter still insisted, "No, you shall never wash my feet" (8). Peter thought he was being humble when he refused the foot washing by the Lord. Jesus had something important to tell him. Look at verse 8b. *Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."* What does this mean? Spiritually speaking, washing another person's feet is to bear his weaknesses and sins. Jesus came to this world to wash Peter's feet, that is, to bear all his sins. The cross of Jesus explains the deeper meaning of this. Peter had to accept Jesus' grace of washing his feet. He had to bring forward his dirty feet so that Jesus could wash them. He had to confess his dirty sins so that Jesus could forgive him and give the gift of eternal life. It was important for him to humbly accept the love of Jesus by letting him wash his smelly feet.

Likewise, it is important for us to bring all our sins and lay them before Jesus. We are not being humble if we insist on our own ideas and reject Jesus' washing. We must open our spiritual eyes to see that God's love is greater than all our dirty sins. There is no terrible sin that Jesus cannot wash away with his precious blood. In addition, without coming to Jesus with our dirty feet, we cannot have a personal love relationship with him. That is what Jesus meant when he said, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter had to show his dirty feet to Jesus so that they could be cleansed. I have to show my dirty feet to Jesus to receive his cleansing. I must humble myself to bring my sins and lay them before Jesus in order to receive the grace of his forgiveness.

When Peter heard that he would have no part with Jesus, he was frustrated. He exclaimed, “Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” (9) *Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you”* (10). What does it mean their whole body is clean? It means that Jesus’ disciples are forgiven sinners. We are followers of Jesus who believe in his crucifixion and resurrection. We have been cleansed and sanctified through the blood of Jesus that he shed on the cross to wash away all our sins. We are a new creation in Christ (2Co 5:17). But we are still in the flesh with a sinful body until Jesus comes back and transforms us into a heavenly body. Until then, we must confess our sins daily for forgiveness (1Jn 1:9). Jesus also said that not every one of them was clean. Judas did not repent his sins. He did not commit his life to Jesus. In fact, he was going to betray him (11). Again we learn that we must commit ourselves fully to the Lord so that we may not become like Judas.

III. TO LOVE IS TO SERVE (12-17)

Look at verse 12. *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.* But they did not understand what he meant. They were scratching their heads. So Jesus explained further. Look at verses 13-14. *“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.”*

Still his disciples did not understand Jesus’ teaching. They were puzzled at the notion that a master could serve his servant. This teaching was not compatible with their future plans. Their desire was to hold high positions in Jesus’ kingdom. They wanted to be served, not serve others. So they didn’t want to accept Jesus’ teaching of serving others with love. Perhaps James and John were thinking in their heads, “You mean, we have to wash Peter’s feet?” So Jesus told them again. Look at verse 15. *“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”* Jesus told them to follow his example. Jesus wanted them to follow his example in serving all kinds of sinners, as he had done in his ministry. Jesus really wanted them to serve all kinds of people in order to help them experience the love of God.

Look at verse 16. *“Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.”* It was an unthinkable idea at that time that a master could serve his servant. It is no wonder that Peter had a hard time in accepting this teaching. But if the Son of God humbled himself to wash his disciples’ smelly feet, who are we to say that we cannot humble ourselves to serve our friends?

Finally, look at verse 17. *“Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”* Jesus teaches that serving is not humiliating, but a blessing. Here, “you will be blessed” means “you will be truly happy.” We can be happy when we follow Jesus’ example of washing others’ feet. Notice that Jesus used the “do” verb several times in

this passage. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked (12). “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (15). Then he said, “*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them*” (17). Jesus teaches us that to love is to do. Love is an action. We can discuss love to death, saying many things about it. But if we don’t do anything to show our love, is it true love? Jesus didn’t just say, “I love you guys to the end.” He washed their feet. He gave his life on the cross to demonstrate his love for us. One hymn song says the following: “I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed, That thou might’st ransomed be, And quickened from the dead; I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me?”

Many people cry silently at night, not knowing the love of God. They don’t know that Jesus died on the cross for them. Jesus demonstrated his love for us by washing our feet. Now he wants us to do the same to one another. How can we love our young people? We can do many things for them. But the best way is to help them to come to Jesus and receive God’s love. May the Lord help us to follow his example!