

Allow Me to Wash You

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John 13:1-11

Several years ago, I was invited to preach in the Christian Outreach for Armenians Church in Glendale, CA. After my sermon a man came and hugged me saying; “Badveli, I cannot forget this event. When I was 8 years old, you were my summer camp counselor. I did not know how to tie my shoes. Every morning you tied them for me. Thank you.” I don’t remember this boy. I don’t even remember that I did that. How interesting that a small act of tying someone’s shoes can leave an impact.

What about Jesus washing the feet of his disciples? What is this all about?

Let us review the Gospel of John:

- The “**Book of Signs**” (John 1–12) centers on **Jesus’ public ministry** within Judaism; although the Greeks, too, appeared in chapter 12.
- The “**Book of Glory**” (John 13–21), however, shifts our attention to **Jesus’ private ministry**, to the hour of his glorification (the cross) that has been promised throughout chapters 1–12.
- His audience has been narrowed to the circle of those who truly believe. Chapters 13–17 Jesus is alone with his disciples. Chapters 18–21 record Jesus’ final glorification.¹

[For more explanation about John 13-21(Please read below)]

The upper room events are important teachings of Jesus where Jesus gives instructions how to continue to live in His absence. How the would live under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Now let us read the passage:

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.

²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13;1-5 NIV 11)

Now please notice the many themes Jesus introduced:

Passover, the devil, betrayal, death, departure, resurrection, ascension, servanthood, love...

Jesus is preparing them and us: How do you live in the world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, where there will be persecution and rejection, without missing God's love and God's joy. We will find these themes coming again over and over.

Our setting is the upper room, where Jesus is having supper with his disciples. It was the Passover meal. Let us look at the events as recorded by his disciple John.

“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.” (John 13:1 NIV)

Three themes:

Jesus **knows** the hour had arrived;

he will **depart** to the Father;

and **he loves them** very much- it also means that he had the ultimate expression of love towards them. (know, depart, love)

Again the same themes repeat:

“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,

rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 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.” (John 13:3-5 NIV)

The same themes: Jesus **knew**; will **depart** to the Father; **loves** them by demonstrating (washing the feet).

Talking about feet in the Middle Eastern context is something very low and degrading. You can insult someone if you say, “My shoes are better than you.” You will never show the bottom of your shoes/feet to anyone; that is a big insult.

-What a shameful act was done by an Iraqi reporter a few years ago towards the President in Iraq. A man threw his shoes at him. His intention was not just hurting the President physically, but also to disgrace him. (optional)

The twelve disciples' feet were washed, including Judas' and Peter's.
One who will betray, and one who will deny. (next week, we will discuss)
Amazing how our Lord serves us, humanity... An amazing demonstration of his love towards us.

Jesus is humbly accepting the role of a servant by washing the feet of his disciples.

One of my favorite passages is in Philippians describing what it means for Jesus to become a servant:

**“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing, (literally, He emptied himself)
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:6-8 NIV 11)**

I am giving you all these examples just to show how meaningful it was what Jesus did to his disciples- taking off his garment, putting on the garment of the humility, and becoming like a servant. Remember, washing the feet of the guests was the duty of the slave. By the way, Jewish slaves were exempt, and the job was kept for the Gentile slaves.

This is not just a simple act of humility by Jesus. This is much more than that. Jesus is not simply giving them a lesson in humble service (this will come in 13:14); he is doing something that symbolizes his greater act of sacrifice on the cross (13:7). Only after “the hour” when Jesus is resurrected will any of this make sense. (2;12;12:16).²

Peter: Are you going to wash my feet?

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

⁷ Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

⁸ “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹ “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

¹⁰ 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.” ¹¹ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. (John 13:6-11 NIV11)

Two words are used here for washing.

To take a bath *louo*, *total bathing*

To wash *nipto*, *partial bathing*

Let’s explain how things happened. In the Middle East, there were public baths which exist until today. In Aleppo, we had public baths. My parents used to go there every Saturday before they had private baths at home. We boys went for fun. People went there to take a bath. Then on their way to home their feet became dirty, so they needed to wash their feet.

Peter first refuses that Jesus would wash his feet. How could that be? Would a Rabbi do that?

Why Peter refused for Jesus to wash?

Amote? Shame? Pride? No way, my Rabbi?

Have you ever had this experience, not Jesus, but if someone washed your feet?

It is difficult to allow them to do it?

How about allowing Jesus to wash your feet

Jesus: **Unless I wash you, you have no part with me,**

Peter (goes to the other extreme): **OK, wash my whole body!**

Jesus: **Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean (vs 10).**

God cleanses us through the cross of Jesus Christ. That is once and for all.

However, our feet need daily cleansing. Jesus can clean our dirty feet every day.

Do this to Each Other

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. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for

you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:12-17 NIV 11)

The disciples follow in the steps of the Lord. We follow in the steps of our Lord. If Jesus did it, we learn from Him and do it to each other.

However, when Jesus washes our feet, he is washing our sins away. We obviously can't do that. When we wash each other's feet, we don't offer the cleansing of sins.

Jesus' act of sacrifice cannot be repeated, but his model of self-giving love can become a natural feature of the community that follows him and imitates him (13:14-15). Later Jesus will say that our love for one another should be like his in yet another way: we may be called to lay down our lives for our friends (15:12-13).⁵

We are called to wash each other's feet. Whatever that means in your life. Humble, self-sacrificing service.

Do you see what is happening? Jesus is not just washing the feet of the disciples. It is not just a good gesture of humility; it is more than that.

Jesus is the Messiah.

He is the one who came to this earth to bring the Good News of salvation. **The ultimate love and servanthood were demonstrated on the cross.**

Application:

-Allow Jesus to wash your "feet". Allow Jesus to wash the "dirty" areas of your life. The prostitute came to be stoned yet left allowing Jesus to "wash" her old life. "Go and do not sin" was the command.

We all need to allow Jesus to wash our feet, otherwise we do not have any connection with him.

-Also washing each other's feet has a powerful application.

Missionaries came to serve us in the Middle East. I cannot forget those people who left their home and came to us in Kharpert, Sivas, Aintab, Marash, Aleppo, Beirut, and washed our feet. Personally, I have witnessed the sacrifices of our missionaries in Ainjar, Lebanon.

-What does it mean to wash feet today?

Kevin told me about a lady maybe you never heard, I did not hear her name before. **Henrietta Mears**

She refused to be on faculty of Fuller seminary giving more time to her church Sunday school ministry.

Remaining in her position as a Sunday school teacher and head of the education program at a local church, she found ways to help shape an entire movement. Though she was never married, her “boys” included many of the principal architects of the “new evangelical” movement that grew out of earlier fundamentalism.

The list of prominent leaders she influenced would make up a full page of a Who’s Who of Evangelicalism. Her strongest lasting influence was in shaping the ministry and message of Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright. In 1953 Mears began a decade-long residence with the Brights in her impressive home next to the UCLA campus. She also had a large influence on Jim Rayburn, founder of Young Life.

The most famous example of how she exponentially multiplied her influence is Billy Graham.

More than 400 of her “boys” went into full-time ministry and many others became prominent lay leaders. ⁴

So many unknown names made major difference in ministry. Why?

You allowed Jesus to wash your feet, and that helped you to wash others.

I will leave you with this question: What does it mean in your life to wash each other’s feet?

Amen

Explanation about John 13-21

Raymond Brown likes to compare the literary form of the Gospel of John with the arc of a pendulum.⁶ Its swing begins up high, reaches a low point, and then returns to its original elevation.

Even the prologue of John reflects this structure:

In 1:1 the Word exists in the realm of God;

in 1:10 there is the crisis of rejection;

in 1:18 Jesus is once again identified with God.

Likewise, John’s Gospel introduces Jesus as the Word that enters the world in his incarnation.

He gloriously reveals his identity to Judaism through miraculous signs.

But as the story unfolds, hostility increases.

Although Jesus is divine light shining in the world, the darkness is coming, threatening to extinguish him. At its lowest ebb, Judas departs to betray him, at “night” (13:30).

The Book of Glory is now the upswing of the pendulum as the Book of Signs is the downswing.⁷

Yet, for John our author, the death of **Jesus is not a tragedy**. The cross is not a low point. It is the highest moment of Jesus' glory.

Last Sunday from chapter 12 I read: "**The Son of Man will be 'lifted up'**" (12:32), And when he does he will draw everyone to himself.

Brothers and sisters, "the cross is where Jesus 'elevated' above all, hailed as glorious ruler; through his resurrection, he is empowered to return to his place in heaven."⁸

1. Gary M. Bruce, *NIV Application Commentary* p363

2. *ibid* p 369

3. Gary M. Bruce, *NIV Application Commentary* p371

4. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/mother-evangelicalism-henrietta-mears/>

6. R. Brown, John, 2:541.

7. Gary M. Bruce, *NIV Application Commentary* p363

8. *ibid* p 364