

The Gospel of John

The Suffering Servant

John 13:5-17

INTRODUCTION:

Please open your Bibles to John 13. Here God's Word has moved forward to the night before the cross. He is in the upper room with His disciples during the Last Supper. Here the Lord gave His followers a new commandment. We see it first in John 13:34 where Jesus said,

John 13:34 (NASB)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Loving one another like Jesus loves us?

How can we possibly do that? Jesus knew that His disciples were still struggling with how to love others and what that meant. He knew that all of us have a streak of selfishness in our old sin nature. We were born with it, and it can be hard for us to overcome. They did not understand that Jesus had come to this earth to be a suffering servant and to be a savior for mankind. So He used these last precious hours with them to prepare them for this truth by washing the feet of each of them.

All Stand and Read Scripture

John 13:5-17 (NASB)

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.

Prayer

BODY:

I. AN EXAMPLE OF SERVITUDE.

John 13:5 (NASB)

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.

The King of the universe stooped to wash His follower's feet! In the holy land, feet were coated with dust because of the dry environment. When it did rain, feet and toes were caked with mud. The Jews wore sandals not modern shoes. The streets were traveled by foot and donkeys, not by cars, trucks and SUVs, so we can imagine the raw sewage lying in the roads. We can imagine the filth and dirt that covered their feet. That is why every house had a water-pot, washbowl and pitcher by the door to wash the feet of those who entered.

In Jesus' day the washing of feet was a task reserved for the lowest servants of all. But the King of all creation stooped down that night to wash His follower's feet!

For Jesus, it was the display of His humility and His servant hood. For the disciples, the washing of their feet was in direct contrast to their heart attitudes at that time. For us, washing feet is symbolic of our role in the body of Christ.

When Jesus rose from the table and began to wash the feet of the disciples He was doing the work of the lowliest of servants. The disciples must have been stunned at this act of humility and condescension, that Christ, their Lord and master, should wash the feet of His disciples, when it was their proper work to have washed His. But when Jesus came to earth the first time, He came not as King and Conqueror, but as the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. The humility expressed by His act with towel and basin foreshadowed His ultimate act of humility and love on the cross.

Jesus' attitude of servant hood was in direct contrast to that of the disciples, who had recently been arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest.

Luke 22:24-27 (NASB)

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.

Since there was no servant present to wash their feet, it would never have occurred to them to wash one another's feet. When the Lord Himself stooped to this lowly task, they were stunned into silence.

II. A SYMBOL OF JESUS AS SAVIOR.

John 13:6-11 (NASB)

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.”

To his credit, Peter was profoundly uncomfortable with the Lord washing his feet, and, never being at a loss for words, Peter protested, “**Never shall You wash my feet!**”

Then Jesus said something that must have further shocked Peter: “**If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.**” Prompting Peter, whose love for the Savior was genuine, to request a complete washing. Then Jesus explained the true meaning of being washed by Him. The dirt on his feet represented sin. Jesus was symbolically wiping away his sin. Peter had experienced the cleansing of salvation and did not need to be washed again in the spiritual sense. Salvation is a one-time act of justification by faith, but the lifelong process of sanctification is one of washing from the stain of sin we experience as we walk through the world. Peter and the disciples—all except Judas, who never belonged to Christ—needed only this temporal cleansing.

This truth is just one of several from this incident that Christians can apply to their own lives. First, when we come to Christ for the washing of our sins, we can be sure that it is permanent and complete. No act on our part can cleanse us further from our sin, as our sin has been exchanged for the perfect righteousness of Christ on the cross.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)

²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

But we do need continual cleansing from the effects of living in the flesh in a sin-cursed world. This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives within us.

Peter didn't understand it. And sometimes we don't understand what God is doing in our lives. But one thing Peter did know for sure: He knew that without Jesus we have no hope. Peter knew that Jesus is the only one who can save us. Jesus Christ is the only one who can wash away our sins. So Peter said “**Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.**”

Anything Jesus wants to do in our lives is exactly what we need. But more than anything else, Jesus wants to make us clean. And He can do it, because when Jesus died on the cross, He took on Himself the **guilt and punishment** for **our** sins. We did not deserve it, but our sins were wiped away and our union with God was restored.

Through this foot-washing, Jesus pointed us to the much bigger truth that only the Lord can wash away our sins. But Jesus had to take the filth of our sins in order to make us clean.

You must not be like Judas who rejected and betrayed the Lord. There is no salvation without Jesus Christ. But Jesus will save you and wash your sins away, **IF** you will trust Him and receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

Once we have been cleansed of our sin, we are told to live a new life in Christ. We are to love others by humbly serving them as He demonstrated to us. We see this exhortation for servitude in verses 12-15:

III. AN EXHORTATION TO SERVE LIKE CHRIST.

John 13:12-15 (NASB)

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.

Consider this! **Who washed Jesus' feet?**

Verse 12 says that "*when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again* " There were 12 men who got their feet washed that day. But there were 13 men in that room. Jesus returned to the table with unwashed feet. **The disciples were washed clean, while the Holy Master was left with the dirt of the world clinging to Him.**

Except for the unbelieving traitor Judas, Jesus made the disciples fully clean. And because of the cross, He can make you clean forever. But there is no salvation without Jesus Christ.

Jesus showed us how to serve others. There were 11 saved disciples in the room that night. But there was only one man there with a servant's heart, and it was Jesus Christ. Luke 22 helps us see this truth, because Luke tells us that even at this supper, the disciples were still arguing about who was the greatest.

Luke 22:24-27 (NASB)

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.

The disciples were still arguing about who was the greatest. Jesus showed them what true greatness consisted of. As they argued, the basin sat in the corner, untouched. The towel laid on the floor, unused. The servant's clothing hung on the wall, unworn. Each disciple sees these things. Each disciple knows their purpose. But no one moves, except Jesus.

As they bicker, He stands, but He doesn't speak. He removes His robe and takes the servant's wrap off of the wall. Taking the pitcher, He pours the water into the basin. He

kneels before them with the basin and sponge and begins to wash. The towel that covers His waist is also the towel that dries their feet.

First Jesus **showed** them how to serve. Then He began to **teach** them about serving others. Again in vs. 13-15, Jesus said:

John 13:13-15 (NASB)

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.

Does this mean that we are supposed to wash each other's feet? -- Maybe.

God may never ask you to wash a dirty foot, but He certainly wants us to have hearts to serve because it brings glory to God and it can help bring lost people to Jesus.

When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He told them (and us), "**For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.**" As His followers, we are to emulate Him, serving one another in lowliness of heart and mind, seeking to build one another up in humility and love. When we seek the preeminence, we displease the Lord who promised that true greatness in His kingdom is attained by those with a servant's heart.

John 13:16-17 (NASB)

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.

"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Think about this! If you understand that Jesus taught that humility is necessary for greatness, it is nearly impossible to successfully argue over who is greatest. For as soon as you declare your greatness over someone else, who has become the more humble?

Greatness is not measured by how we rank in this world. It is measured by how we serve others.

Biblical humility is not only necessary to enter the kingdom, it is also necessary to be great in the kingdom.

Matthew 20:26b-28 (NASB)

²⁶...whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Here Jesus is our model. Just as He did not come to be served, but to serve, so must we commit ourselves to serving others, considering their interests above our own.

Philippians 2:3-8 (NASB)

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own

personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

In His humility, He was always obedient to the Father and so should the humble Christian be willing to put aside all selfishness and submit in obedience to God and His Word.

There is a special satisfaction that comes from serving the Lord. It is a very hard concept to understand until you actually experience it. It is better than anything the world has to offer. And God gives this satisfaction to His people, because He loves us.

CONCLUSION:

Nobody could possibly love us more than Jesus Christ! How much does He love us?

Enough to become a servant for us, enough to sacrifice Himself for us, enough to show us the how to serve others, and enough to stand by us forever.

When we come to Christ as sinners, we must come in humility. Humility is a heart attitude, not merely an outward demeanor. One may put on an outward show of humility but still have a heart full of pride and arrogance. We acknowledge that we come with nothing to offer Him but our sin and our need for salvation. We recognize our lack of merit and our complete inability to save ourselves. Then when He offers the grace and mercy of God, we accept it in humble gratitude and commit our lives to Him and to others. We “die to self” so that we can live as new creations in Christ.

We should never forget that He has exchanged our worthlessness for His infinite worth and our sin for His righteousness.

Galatians 2:20 (NASB)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

That is the path to true greatness.

SERVE LIKE CHRIST!

This is the Day.