

AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY - Studies in John's Gospel

Part fifty-one - Sunday, July 7th, 2024, 10 a.m.

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THE *TWO LESSONS* JESUS TAUGHT BY WASHING DIRTY FEET

John 13:1-20 - “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. [18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ [19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. [20] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

In twenty-four hours from this text Jesus will be dead and buried. The last nine chapters of John’s account deal with the last day of Jesus’ earthly life. We are entering holy territory here. By sheer bulk of written space John means for us to sense the importance of not missing an ounce of detail and truth.

One thousand six hundred and fourteen years ago a godly scholar named ***Severian of Gabala*** wrote these words in his ***“Homily on the Washing of Feet”*** - ***“He who wraps the heavens in clouds wrapped round himself a towel. He who pours the water into the rivers and pools tipped water into a basin. And he before whom every knee bends in heaven and on earth and under the earth knelt to wash the feet of his disciples.”***

Jesus has an obvious desire to cement previously expressed ideas in a more visible, rememberable fashion before He is crucified and leaves His disciples. John's is the only gospel telling us Jesus actually *interrupted* the supper they were having to wash the disciples' feet. All the other synoptics tells us it was *after* supper that Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

John says Jesus actually *halted* the entire evening's activities and washed those dirty feet far after it was customary to do so - **John 13:2 & 4 -**
"During supper (different from the KJV), when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him....[4] rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist." - IPAD TEXT

So what was so urgent? What was poking at Jesus' mind that everything was set-up - actually *structured* - to make this foot-washing stand out so in everyone's mind? There is nothing subtle about the way Jesus orchestrates this. What did Jesus want to teach that couldn't wait until *after* supper?

- 1) **NOTICE JOHN'S BACKGROUND THEOLOGY AS HE SETS UP THE STORY OF THE FOOT-WASHING**

IPAD TEXT - John 13:1-3 - “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....”

This is not just *pre-amble* from John. He is setting up how he wants us to *understand* Jesus’ actions. He is trying to tell us this account isn’t just about *feet*. He’s trying to tell us Jesus isn’t just being *polite*. There’s a *meaning* - a *very deep* meaning - in Jesus’ actions.

- a) *John again links Jesus’ “hour” with the Feast of the Passover - John 13:1 - “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.” - IPAD TEXT*

We're reminded again Jesus didn't die as a **tragic misunderstanding** or merely at the hands of a **violent mob**. There is a **clear plan** unfolding - a divine, sovereign **schedule**. Jesus will die as the **ultimate completion** of all the Passover lambs whose spilled blood was a reminder of the deliverance of God's people from their worst oppressors in Egypt. That deliverance was a tiny foretaste of the coming deliverance from sin and death itself through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the reason for John's second background point:

- b) ***Father God and Satan are poised against each other in the first two sentences of our text - John 13:2 - "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him..." - IPAD TEXT***

Interesting. This isn't Father God against **Judas**. That's how it will play out on the **visible** side of things, but it's not where John draws up the battle lines. It's the **Father** versus the **Devil** in this ultimate combat. John focuses on the **invisible** nature of the conflict that will culminate in Jesus' death.

John's logic shouldn't be surprising to careful readers. This is the final playing out of the same battle terms John has already recorded in Jesus' words in **John 12:31-32 - "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. [32] And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."** - IPAD TEXT

This is why there are no *recorded exorcisms* in John's gospel account. That they *did* take place exactly as the synoptic writers recorded them is true enough. But John has a deeper, more precious point to make. This is John's way of magnifying the decisive ground zero - the point that there was coming in Christ *one massive, conclusive, irrevocably permanent, history shattering exorcism of the Devil. And it would happen on the cross of Jesus Christ.*

Hear it church. And remember it through all the trials and storms of life. It is an unchangeable fact - *Easter Sunday's headlines are "Jesus won the weekend!"*

- c) *Through Jesus' "Passover" death everything important now comes to us through Jesus Christ alone - **John 13:3 - "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...."** - IPAD TEXT*

Note John's emphasis that the Father had given "***all things***" into his (the Son's) hands." This is a grand summary statement. Jesus' mission is the Father's master plan to provide and accomplish "***all things***" important. In John's gospel this means "***all things***" for ***our salvation*** and "***all things***" for ***the Father's glory***.

You can't take away Jesus' death and have either of these things. If you remove the cross there is no degree of human merit or performance that can remove inward sin. There aren't enough feet to wash in the entire universe. And if you remove the cross there is no way any other accomplishment can end in Father God's glory. This is a ***must-remember point*** in our religiously pluralistic world. God can't be ***pleased*** without exclusive honor being given to the work of His Son.

When John uses those words "***all things***" it is his way of saying it is ***through Christ Jesus - God the Son - that Father God does everything important for us***. In other words, ***everything that matters*** can only be found in Christ Jesus. Life apart from Christ is, as John has recorded earlier, like "***walking in the darkness***." And people who walk in the darkness don't "***know where they are going***"(John 12:35-36).

This is the theology behind the actions of Jesus. Now on to the foot-washing itself. John divides the account into two primary teaching sections. The **first** has to do with how disciples are **made** clean and how they **stay** clean. The **second** has to do with the surprising way disciples will **find happiness** in this earthly life. We'll study each in turn:

2) **JESUS' COMING DEATH WINS A VICTORY GREATER THAN OUR OWN CONSCIENCE**

IPAD TEXT - John 13:4-11 - "[Jesus] 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."

John gives us a clue that this is not just about Jesus washing dirty feet. Peter could see what Jesus was doing with the water and the towel easily enough. But Jesus makes it clear that there is something happening at that **present** moment that Peter won't be able to understand until a **future** moment - **John 13:7 - "Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.'"** - IPAD TEXT

Why can't Peter understand this right now? Because it's all about the cross and Jesus' coming death. It's about how people like Peter and multiplied millions of others will be made "**completely clean**"(13). And Peter just isn't in a place to appreciate this yet. But soon he will get it.

This has become one of my favorite accounts in the New Testament. I need to add that I read it for years without fully getting it. It has become an account I treasure for very precious lessons:

- a) *There is something Jesus wants to do for Peter for which Peter feels totally unworthy - John 13:6-8 - “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.” - IPAD TEXT*

Please don't miss this. Peter knows who **he** is and he knows who **Jesus** is. Jesus shouldn't be doing this for someone like Peter. It just doesn't fit. Peter's **conscience** is making it hard for Peter to **receive** from Jesus. That's the money point in this text.

The lesson here is if we are going to receive the grace and forgiveness we desperately need from Jesus we will have to let His promise override the deepest truths we know about ourselves. Even conscience must submit to the gospel and bow before Christ.

Don't misunderstand. The conscience is designed to help us with our **ethics** and **moral guidance**. It is given by God for that very purpose. But it can never help us with our **salvation**. Grace, by its very definition, always conflicts with our own conscience. We **know** we don't deserve it. That's why it's called "**grace**" in the first place.

- b) ***There is no way for Peter - or anyone else - to enjoy Christ's presence without the cleansing of His atoning death - John 13:8 - "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." - IPAD TEXT***

We need these words from Jesus. We'd love to think we can have Jesus' presence just by **mimicking** Jesus. Perhaps, like Jesus will reveal shortly, we can just wash enough dirty feet to win His divine smile of approval. We can care for the environment. We can push for fair trade with the poor nations of the earth. We can fight economic injustice. Surely **this** would put us in Jesus' camp. There's a lot of traffic going down that road for redemption in the contemporary church.

Then everything gets quiet and Jesus speaks - ***“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me”***(8). This is Jesus responding to the ***“What can wash away my sin?”*** question. Nothing but the blood of Jesus, indeed.

- c) ***Disciples must abide in the same cleansing work of Christ once they have been made clean - John 13:9-10 - “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.” - IPAD TEXT***

These are profound words. There is something about our fallen personhood that soils inward cleanness. It is preciously true that each moment of failure doesn't forfeit salvation. Even in our weakness we are miraculously deemed ***“completely clean”***(10). We aren't victims of ***“eternal insecurity.”***

But our feet - the point Jesus demonstrated so vividly in this acted out redemption parable - ***the most exposed and direct contact those disciples had with this world*** - our feet get dirty. This world pulls us into itself with more effect than the average Christian senses.

We are ***trained*** to laugh at immorality by the media. We are ***trained*** to think of moral absolutes as unloving and intolerant. We are ***trained*** to think all religions are worthy if practiced in sincerity. We are ***trained*** to think people are narrow minded who speak out against ungodliness.

That's what Jesus means when He tells Peter he's clean, all right, but his feet need constant attention and washing. In Romans 12 the Apostle Paul would say disciples' ***minds*** need constant renewing because of the ***conforming influence*** of the world in which we walk. Same thing.

Now on to the ***second*** teaching lesson in the foot-washing:

3) **INWARD CLEANSING GRACE MANIFESTS ITSELF IN HUMBLE SERVICE TO OTHERS**

IPAD TEXT - John 13:12-20 - "[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.* [18] I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ [19] I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. [20] Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

Some have taken these words to mean we should have regular foot-washing times in the church. I doubt very much that is the intention of this text. There is no mention of any *practice* of ongoing foot-washing in the rest of the New Testament. And our physical feet don't get exposed to the grime of unpaved roads and open sewer systems common in Jesus' day.

But there *are* people needing our touch and our ministry. There are fellow believers who need *servicing*. And Jesus makes it visually and vividly clear that following Him as Lord doesn't and can't just mean *admiring* Him and *singing songs* about Him and *memorizing His words*.

Our Lord and Master - God the Son - **stooped** to serve. He interrupted the supper to **serve** (could this have been His way of reminding us we will have to put our own needs **second** if we're going to put serving others **first?**).

There is only one kind of spiritual **knowing** that produces inward joy - **John 13:17** - "**If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.**" We are being reminded by Jesus how inward delight is usually missed by church-going believers. We can easily think of **doing** the Jesus-life as a lot of work. We're all busy before we even begin to factor in the things Jesus might require of us.

And there's the issue. Good spiritual changes will never come to those who automatically think of regular, sacrificial service to the body of Christ as more **work**. Doing what Jesus does only looks like work from the **outside**. Once the whole life is re-organized around seeking His kingdom first, things that used to excite us feel empty and the things that we avoided because we felt unqualified or too busy start to nourish our souls.

And the whole early church, joyfully yielding up homes, lands, life, and limb, proved the truth of Jesus' radical words.