

Washing Feet

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, please open back up to John chapter 13. That's where we'll be this evening. A little bit of context for our passage.

We're actually at a turning point in John's Gospel. Things have been kind of moving along at a rapid pace, and John has been describing who the Word become flesh is. And all these different signs that Jesus has been doing have been revealing who He is and what He's come to do.

And now, all of a sudden, what's been moving so fast slows down to a snail's pace. And John chapter 13 to 17 is what's called the upper room discourse.

Jesus, He is about to go and face crucifixion. He's about to face the cross. The disciples, even though He's been trying to prepare them, don't really know what's coming, and He spends this time with them.

Teaching them, again, who He is and what He's come to do, and preparing them, not just for what's to come in that moment, but as they go back and they look at it later in life going, oh, that's what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

[1 : 14] So the setting, it's Jerusalem. It's the Feast of Passover, and so the city is packed with people. And Jesus and the disciples, they retreat from the crowds, and they've rented a room one floor above the ground floor, and they all pack in there.

And they share a meal together, and in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all those Gospel writers, they really focus on the meal. And instead, the Gospel of John, which was probably written maybe two decades after those Gospels, instead, John takes a different route.

And he focuses instead on this act that Jesus does of foot washing. But in it, it describes what that meal is all about.

I'm taking communion next week, right? Maybe it's a good time to reflect on that even. This is our pre-pre-communion sermon. Before we look more closely at the text, let's pray, though, for the preaching of God's Word.

Pray with me. Lord God, we ask that you would speak right now. Help us to behold your love and grace and truth, to see it, Lord.

[2 : 29] Would you give us ready ears and hearts to receive your Word, to take it in, to let it speak to the areas of our life maybe that we want to hide? And Father, would you help us to make it a part of our lives, we need you to do this for us.

We pray this in the name of our King and foot washer. Amen. So we said, Jesus, he is about to depart for the cross, and later he's going to be raised, and he's going to go back to heaven.

And so he leaves some of his most important instructions with his disciples before he departs. And the very first thing he instructs them to do in the upper room is to wash smelly feet.

Wash feet. About to leave. Here's what you need to know, disciples. Love is washing feet. Love is washing feet.

Okay, what are we supposed to learn from this, that love is washing feet? Three things to outline for the sermon. First off, it's an act to behold. Secondly, it's a cleansing to receive.

[3 : 43] And third, it's an example to replicate. So first off, it's an act to behold. Second, it's a cleansing to receive. And then lastly, it's an act to replicate. So first off, an act to behold.

The first thing is to see what Jesus is doing. So everybody, they're in the upper room, and they're reclined at the table on one elbow. And verse 1 tells us that Jesus knows that his hour has come for him to depart.

If you go through the Gospel of John, every single time it talks about Jesus' hour. Think about the first miracle he does. What does he say to Mary? It's not yet my hour. Every single time it refers to his hour, it's referring to his crucifixion.

Crucifixion of what it means that he's actually the Messiah and what he has come to do. I don't know about you, but when I have a lot on my mind, it is very, very hard for me to pay attention to other people and to give them some time.

Like if I'm cramming for a sermon at the last minute, I'm shutting the door, and my kids love me by coming in every five minutes to remind me that they exist. And it's hard for me to concentrate.

[4 : 54] Just with a tiny thing upcoming. Can you imagine the hardest thing in your entire life? What it looks like to focus on other people. Jesus, who is about to face the cross, knows that his hour is coming.

And he's moved towards washing his disciples' feet. Jesus is present. He's thinking of his disciples. And so with the end in mind, it says that Jesus, who's loved his disciples, he loves them to the end. And that word to the end, it can kind of either have the connotation that he loves them, like in length of time. He's loved them so far from the time he's called them, and he hasn't stopped until now. Or it could even have the connotation that he loves them to the uttermost.

Either way, right, it should be a great comfort to us that Jesus' love is persistent. It's not fickle. And either way, it's setting us up for this great demonstration, this great act of love that's explaining and foreshadowing not only what's to come, but what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

And verse 2, it sneaks in this little thing, right? Who's present? Judas. He is literally about to go sell Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver.

[6 : 11] Remember, there's nothing cozy and romantic about this picture that we have. This is not just love portrayed. This is love betrayed happening.

And what does the fullness of Jesus' love move him to do? Verses 4 to 5, it says he stands and he lays aside his outer garment. The outer garment would be one seamless robe.

It would be the most expensive piece of clothing that you owned. If you remember, a few chapters later, Jesus is on the cross and all the soldiers, they're dividing his things. And what do they do with the garment? They cast lots for it because they don't want to tear it.

Because if you do that, you're ripping apart this very costly thing. So Jesus, he takes off the most expensive piece of clothing. He doesn't just take that off.

He puts then on a towel and he ties it around his waist. This would be the dress of a menial servant. You know, it's one thing to put on the clothes of a servant.

[7 : 13] It's another thing to take off something of great value and to clothe oneself in humility. It should be echoing in your mind like what Paul says in Philippians 2. That Jesus, even though he was God, he emptied himself and took the form of a servant.

The king comes as a servant. Laying aside not only his costly robe, not only the prerogatives of a king, but even the very glory due to the creator of the universe.

The word has become flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory. The glory of a servant king. He's already veiled his godness in our humanity.

And now he is putting on the clothes of a shoeshine boy. But although his deity is veiled in flesh, it actually ends up revealing more deeply who God is.

God is love. So Jesus continues. He pours the water into the basin and he systematically goes around and he washes the disciples' feet.

[8 : 25] He takes the towel then to dry them. And now, I'm here to point out the obvious sometimes. Feet don't smell good.

I mean, I'm sure yours do, right? You're the one exception. They smell like roses. You can hike the West Highland Way for nine days and I'm sure your feet smell great. But all the rest of us, feet don't smell good.

And to take it a step further, the disciples' feet could probably be categorized as fairly stank. I was preaching on this passage about a month ago at the Free Church in Blackwood and Kirkmuir Hill and I learned a new Scottish word.

I think if I'm saying it correctly, *baufen*. Is that it? That's what the disciples' feet were like. It's a fantastic word. Good job by all of you. That is just a really good word. But that, you know, again, to point out the obvious, sometimes we forget.

Back then, they wore open-toed shoes. They were in an arid, dry, dusty climate. And a few of the main roads at their time would be paved with stone, but the rest of them would usually be dirt, just sand and dirt.

[9 : 32] And not only that, to be tactful, things would be dumped in the street. You know, there's no indoor plumbing. There's lots of animals in the city. In fact, in that time, there was a job and somebody had, and the title of it was the manure merchant.

And your job was just to go up and to clean all of the streets. If anything else, maybe you can give thanks to the Lord that your vocation is not the manure merchant. Again, feet are gross.

That's what you're walking around. I mean, still, like, I mean, they were careful and clean, right? But if you want a picture of the grimy, yucky nature of sin, then maybe you should look at some feet from first century Palestine.

And, you see, the thing is, they knew. They knew how demeaning of a task foot washing was. In fact, there were rules and laws that even if you were a very rich Jew and you had servants, you were not allowed to ask them to wash your feet.

In the customs of that day, the only time a Jewish person could do that is if they had a Gentile servant. I'm not saying that that makes it okay, but I'm just trying to get across. They knew how lowly of a task this was.

[10 : 46] In fact, in all of Jewish history in the Greco-Roman world, there is not a single example of a superior washing the feet of an inferior.

This is the only thing. It's one of a kind. And even with that in mind, it is one thing to wash the feet of an honored guest.

It is quite another thing to wash the feet of a guy who is about to betray you for 30 pieces of silver, another guy who's about to deny you three times, and the rest of the lot who's about to fall asleep on you in your greatest moment of need.

But such is the lowly, humble act of this rabbi. And the disciples, he just stare in stunned disbelief. This is the first thing. It is an act to behold. The greatest one in the kingdom stoops the lowest. Jesus, who came from the highest point of glory and honor, he goes lower than anyone could imagine.

[11 : 56] And in fact, in a few chapters, he is going to go even lower still. I mean, you can imagine some big, hot shot billionaire from Scotland flies to the slums of Calcutta.

And if he tossed himself in a dirty puddle and let a beggar walk across his back, that would pale in comparison to the stooping and the humility that Jesus does here.

For the foot washing to act, to start to do the work it's supposed to do, we first have to behold it. There's this movie called The Straight Story.

Has anybody ever seen The Straight Story before? We got one back there. Don't rush out and buy it. It's like, I mean, if you need a good nap, you can wash it. But basically, in this movie, it's about this guy who travels on his lawnmower.

That's like the whole movie. It's like very slow, right? It's not a Marvel movie by any stretch of the imagination. It's called The Straight Story. The man, his name is Alvin Straight. And he has pretty much every physical ailment that you could possibly imagine.

[13 : 05] And Alvin hears that his estranged brother, Lyle, is sick and he's about to pass away. And they haven't spoken for 10 years.

And Alvin knows, if I'm going to fix this, if I'm going to reconcile with my brother, I need to go do it now. What's the problem? Well, Alvin, who has all of these physical malady, is not allowed to drive. And there's no bus that's going to go where he needs to go. But he's got a lawnmower, a riding lawnmower. So he hops on the riding lawnmower and he drives 370 miles to see Lyle.

And he sleeps at night in this little trailer back behind this lawnmower. And along the way, the movie is basically him meeting all these different people along the way. And spoiler alert, about to spoil the end of the movie, the very last scene, he pulls into Lyle's front yard.

His front yard, excuse me. And you can hear the humming of the lawnmower. And this causes Lyle to walk out. The door creaks open. He's got his little Zimmer frame.

[14 : 11] And he looks like, if you looked up the word cranky in the dictionary, there would be a picture of Lyle next to him. Just hardened face. What on earth is that noise?

What's that racket on my front lawn? And he comes out. And he stares at his estranged brother, Alvin. He's quiet. He doesn't say a single word.

He kind of looks. Confused and angry. And Alvin walks up. And he walks up to the front porch. And he sits down in a chair. And Lyle sits down next to him.

It's just silent. And then Lyle looks at Alvin. And he looks at the lawnmower. And he looks back at Alvin. And he says, Did you come here this whole way on that to see me?
And Alvin says, Yep. And Lyle, those lines in his face, impressed there by years of scowling, start to soften.

[15 : 28] And the tears well up in his eyes. End of the movie. Beholding the lawnmower told Lyle what he needed to know.

And as he stared at it, he realized the depths that his brother would go to. How much he would humble himself to show and to restore love.

The medium is the message. Maybe if I could just encourage you right now before we move on to anything else. Have you beheld the king and foot washer?

Have you beheld what he has come to do? That he loves that much. We don't just come to it once. We need to come back again and again. I mean, I would venture your spouse or your family, you don't just tell him, I love you one time and then you go off and live the rest. If you do, you need to come to marriage counseling.

[16 : 30] We'll talk a little bit. You do it again and again and you seek new ways to show it. Why would we not come back again and again and again and behold this act? And then sing, Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus.

Without prompting, Jesus takes on the lowest role and washes smelly feet. So love is washing feet. First, before anything else, it's an act to behold.

Second thing, though, it's a cleansing to receive. And this part is key. Okay? Don't fall asleep during this part. If you just had point one and point three, it's going to be, Hey, look at that.

Go do it. And you know what's going to happen? How? That's hard. Right? What Jesus does, the one who is the highest, this is what the disciples are going to realize later.

The one who is above all things, preeminent before all things, has stooped the lowest. Now just go and do that. Go on. They say the French horn is one of the hardest instruments to play.

[17 : 34] If any French horn players, you can tell me if that's true or not. But I'd like for you to imagine, you know, somebody who is a maestro French horn player. They say it's easy. This is what you do. They sit down next to you and they show you, this is how you hold it.

You place your hands. This is the embouchure of your lips. And you just, you know, you breathe in and you just, you blow and it makes this beautiful noise and they place something in that's lovely. And you're like, Oh, that sounds great. Let me try.

And you try and it basically sounds like a cat being tortured. Right? Hey, just look. This super hard thing. Just go on and do it. Like, what on earth? This is what Jesus has done. Just lay aside all of your pride and humbly serve in the most startling way possible.

Ready, set, go. Let's pray. Let's sing the last song. Wait, what? Ah, isn't love great? Love. I love love. We love love. Wait, love means what?

Excuse me. What did you say about feet? Thankfully, we have Peter. He's the voice of the disciples who says the things, the ask the questions that we're too afraid to ask and apparently the rest of them were too.

[18 : 37] So Jesus, he's washing the disciples' feet and he gets to Peter and Peter says, are you really going to wash my feet? And Jesus says in verse 7, yeah, yeah, you know, you're not going to totally get this, Pete, but a little bit later you will.

I promise. Okay? Meaning that this points to something even deeper, even a deeper problem than smelly feet that Jesus has come to wash away. This washing business is precisely why Jesus has come into the world.

And Peter is like, no way, Jose. Uh-uh. It ain't going to happen. You know, I get it, Jesus. You're trying to teach us a lesson. We should have washed your feet.

My bad. Please stop. This is too humiliating. We'll get it. Just move on. Maybe even them, they might not get it, but I get it. Just stop. Please. Ain't going to happen.

And Jesus responds by saying, if you don't let me wash you, you have no share with me. He's saying, you know, this isn't just a picture of servanthood.

[19 : 40] This is a picture of salvation. And unless you let the Lamb of God wash you, take your sin, you don't belong to me.

And I don't know if Peter is just like a little stung by those words, or if he's just, you know, normal Peter and super exuberant, the one, you know, who sees Jesus walking on the water and jumps in

the water right away.

I don't know exactly why, but he says in verse 9, oh, if that's, it's that important, Jesus, okay, great. Head to toe. Wash me. And Jesus says in verse 10, he's like, hey, slow down, Peppy Pete. All right, easy, man. You've already been washed. You know, this is kind of a maintenance wash. And remember, in other words, what he's saying, he's talking in the present, but also in the future. He's saying, you know, there is a once and for all act of cleansing, but you still have lingering, stinky sin that needs to be washed away.

[20 : 38] What does this foot washing have to do with receiving? Well, it means two things. We need to receive the insult and receive the grace, both of which are very hard.

You have to receive the insult and it's simply this. your feet stink. That's what I get paid to do. Your feet stink. You know, Jesus isn't going around and washing the disciples' feet and going like, this little piggy went to market, this little piggy. No, that's not the idea. To behold this act and to receive the washing, we have to admit that our feet need washing. that there are bunions and toe jam and ingrown toenails. It's good this isn't the morning service and you're about to go eat lunch, right? I'm sorry for the gross picture, but that is the gross picture. I mean, when was the last time your gag reflex was triggered at the horror of sin? Sin in your own life. We have to receive the insult.

[21 : 43] But second, you also need to receive the grace. We say, okay, okay, I get it. I failed. Can I make it up to you, God? Can I serve you? And if I do a good enough job, then you can give me your glory, right?

That's how it works. But Jesus says to Peter that Peter has to let Jesus do this. You have to let him wash you. It's a cleansing to be received, not achieved.

It's a cleansing to be received by grace, not an act to be achieved on your own. And that is so hard because we don't want to admit that.

I mean, just think about it like in real life. If you really do have smelly feet, you do everything you can to cover that up so nobody can possibly know. It's the last thing you want to admit. It's so hard to receive that insult, but then to also receive that grace.

maybe we need not just to be told to humble ourselves, but maybe we need the one who is providing that washing to actually humble himself.

[22 : 53] And that could actually be the motivation that leads us to trust him to humble ourselves and to receive the insult and to receive the grace. And if we will humble ourselves, it's an amazing thing to think.

He wants to wash my feet. Jesus wants to deal with my problems. My problems are not an occasion for Jesus to roll his eyes and be like, this guy again?

No, those are precisely the reason why he came into the world. Those are the things that he's come to redeem and to throw away. You know, it's so easy to get caught up in doing, and sure, Jesus wants you to do things.

Do things in you and through you. That's the last point of our sermon that we're about to be at. But the Christian life is a perpetual daily reorientation to being served, washed, and loved by Jesus. This is part of the reason why churches emphasize community. It's not just a numbers game, but we want you to be able to, we want to be able to come and to say to one another to be a place where we say, yeah, my feet stink and I need Jesus.

[23 : 59] This is why we emphasize prayer in the Christian life because we get to come to the Lord and again and again and say, yes, you have cleansed me and yes, there is still lingering sin.

Will you come and would you wash me, Jesus? I don't know about you, I come in on a Sunday morning and there are about 10,000 things in my life from the last week. The harsh words that I have spoken, the evil thoughts in my heart, the desire to be over all things, to be in control and for people to see me and look, the lack of love that I have for my wife and my children, at times it stuns me and I come again and again and I say, Lord, would you wash my feet?

We need to be reoriented to the love of Jesus. You know, in community, in prayer, and in worship, we get to come and we get to say, I'm clean but my feet are still dirty. I am justified but still a sinner. I am dressed in the righteousness of Christ and yet my love can still stink. Lord Jesus, would you come? Would you wash my feet? Let me apply this by way of asking a few diagnostic questions. I wonder what grime of yours you think Jesus doesn't want to cleanse. I wonder which one of your problems you think Jesus doesn't really care about.

[25 : 19] I wonder if you won't let Jesus touch your feet, touch those areas of your life because of your pride. I wonder if maybe you ask for prayer in gatherings but it's always prayer about someone else but never prayer for you and struggles that we all have.

It's foot washing love. It's an act to behold. It's a cleansing to receive and last thing and it's an example to replicate. So after everyone's feet are washed, Jesus comes back to the table and he explains the meaning of what he's done.

He says in verses 13 to 16, you call me teacher and Lord and you're right. So if I am that, I have done this for you, you ought to do the same thing. This example that I am giving you is not just the kind of love I have for you but also the kind of love that you should strive to have for one another. In other words, if Jesus, who is so high, stooped so low, can't you say you're sorry? Or lend a helping hand?

Or wash a toilet? Or make time for people? This is hard for everyone, especially now. We live in an age of glamour where glamour and celebrity are the goal.

[26 : 37] Where does servant love fit on your CV? So what does replicating this example look like? Just a few thoughts to close. Ask yourself, who are the people that God is calling me to love and serve?

Don't make it abstract, right? Who are the people that God's placed right in front of you to serve? There's a character in a Dostoevsky novel who has this great line who says, I love humanity but I can't stand my next door neighbor.

Or C.S. Lewis says, everyone loves the idea of forgiveness until you actually have someone to forgive. Everybody loves the idea of serving. It sounds so great until they're faced with the person that they're called to humbly serve, right?

There's a spouse, child, parent, a co-worker, a neighbor, a family member, a church person. Maybe even now just get them in the front of your mind. That is where you're called to go wash feet.

Second thing, show costly love to those even who are not Christians. Again, I mentioned this earlier but Judas is there, right? Even Jesus did that for the one who he quite frankly says in verse 10 hasn't been cleansed.

[27 : 49] So how much more then should we show humble love to people who are outside the community of faith? Third thing, don't tell people how you serve. It's a little time of confession.

It's like I am incapable of cleaning our flat and doing the dishes and then Aaron walks in after I've, I've, humble husband, I've let her go and like study the Bible with other women. Oh man, the sacrifices that I make and I've taken care of the kids and in fact, I didn't just take care of them and put them in their pajamas but oh, the things are clean and it's like five minutes and I'm like, do you notice anything about the flat?

Let's not do that. It's not the point of this. And then last point of application, I hope you're already planning to come next week, next Sunday.

Take the Lord's Supper. We take communion and I want you to come and as you see the bread and the wine, I want you to look at it.

I want you to behold it. To look, to see. It's not just words that you hear, there's a tangible thing that you're looking at and it is a reminder of the humble love of our servant king who washes feet.

[29 : 06] And I want you to receive it. You receive it, right? That's part of why we come like this. Open hands. There ain't nothing in them until Christ's grace is placed in them.

I want you to receive it and I want you to replicate it. See, as we take it in, as we take in the Lord's Supper, what it is, Christ is nourishing us by His Spirit.

Just like you need food to have energy to go and live your life, you need to be fed by His grace so that you can then go out and live in the same way.

Love, it's foot washing. It's an act to behold. Do you see His costly love? Let it argue with you this week. It's a cleansing to receive.

Humble yourself so that you can humbly serve. You didn't earn this, but it's yours in Christ Jesus. It's an example to replicate. Let this be your goal.

[30 : 03] And when you do this, it will be unlike anything the world has ever seen. It's utterly unique because it humbles you so much.

And at the same time as you're humbled, you know how loved and secure you are. And that changes you at your very core. Let's pray and ask that the Lord would help us in this.

Our King Jesus, you who left the splendor and riches of heaven and entered into this broken world, you became enmeshed in this brokenness.

And you would even go to the point of the cross where you took and bore the sins of your people.

Amazing love, how can it be that you, our God, would die for me?

Father, we pray that this would be the theme of our life, of our week, that we would look again and again, look at the gospel, the thing into which angels long to look.

[31 : 20] And Father, would you remind us of the simple fact that you have cleansed us, that you've washed us. And it's the very same grace that we received when we became Christians is still the grace that is going to sustain us and lead us home, make us desperate and thirsty and hungry for your grace.

And Father, we pray then as we go out, as we feast on your love and your grace and your humility, that it would turn us into a humble people, a loving people, a serving people, ones who trust that what we sow and sweat and tears will be reaped in the very kingdom of God.

We pray all this in the name of Christ. Amen.