

# Jesus washing the disciples' feet

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[ 0 : 00 ] Gospel, chapter 13, verse 4 and 5, to read these words. Jesus rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, 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. Amen. During this communion weekend of services leading up to coming to the Lord's table this coming Sabbath and obedience to his command, given to his disciples and given to his followers in every generation, do this in remembrance of me.

We seek in these preparatory services to examine and to prepare ourselves for coming to his table and to show our love for our Lord.

Paul made it very clear to the Corinthians, chapter 11, that we are to examine ourselves first and then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

in any group of people gathered for these services, there will be those of you who have been members for years. There will be those who perhaps have become members in recent times.

[ 1 : 35 ] There will be those of you who know and love the Lord Jesus as your Lord and Savior and you're regular in worship here on Sunday on the Lord's Day.

You're attending the prayer meeting during the week and yet you still have to publicly profess your faith and come forward and join with your brothers and sisters around our Lord's table.

There may even be some present who have yet never experienced salvation and have yet to come in repentance and faith and acknowledge Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

But for whatever reason you're here this evening, I pray that together that we all know the presence of the Spirit of the living God and that we know His Spirit ministering to us individually and personally just wherever we stand this evening so that on that final day when Jesus returns to the earth as judge, we will all be going to join with Him at the table in glory where the marriage feast of the Lamb is being prepared.

Jesus was at supper with His disciples. In the middle of supper, He arose from it, laid aside His outer garments and taking a towel, tied it around His waist, then poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

[ 3 : 20 ] Why did He do it? He was their Master, He was their Lord. Why would Jesus, the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, the Creator of the universe, stoop to remove the sandals of His disciples and then proceed to wash their dirty, smelly feet?

Before we answer this question, let's go back three years to the beginning of Christ's ministry. Just as He was starting out and looked briefly at John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus' identity and why He had come.

Firstly then, John's testimony. John the Baptist, one of the most well-known and colourful characters in the Scriptures, someone we hear very little about from His arrival and His birth and there's nothing for 30 years until he erupts onto the scene of world history at God's appointed hour and God's appointed place and begins preaching and proclaiming a baptism of repentance in the Judean wilderness.

John's message was bold, it was direct and it was all geared to preparing the way for the coming Messiah. He was the first prophetic voice to be heard amongst God's people, the Jews, for over 400 years and the people flocked from all over the country to hear and to see John and hear what he had to say.

There was much speculation amongst the populace as to whether John himself might indeed be the Messiah or perhaps Elijah or the prophet and the Pharisees were so curious they sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to determine just who exactly he might be.

[ 5 : 29 ] John had no problem in confessing that he was none of these but he did say he was the voice of one crying out in the wilderness make straight the way of the Lord as the prophet Isaiah had prophesied earlier.

John then went on to declare he says I baptise you with water but among you stands one you do not know even he who comes after me the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.

The strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. John like Samson had been brought up as a Nazarite set apart for God from his birth for a unique and a specific role.

He had spent years in preparation for his task in the isolation of the desert until the word of the Lord came to him and called him to action.

And when he got the call he was ready he was prepared and he launched into his vacation of being a signpost for the Messiah with an enthusiasm that was tangible.

[ 6 : 55 ] having then identified himself as to who he was and who he wasn't and why he had come these Jews from Jerusalem then asked the question about why he baptized with water if he wasn't the Messiah if he wasn't Elijah if he wasn't the prophet.

John told them that there was one coming after him one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and the very next day he saw Jesus coming and he announced to them and he says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

He announced publicly and professed Jesus as the Lamb of God the one who would be the sacrifice for the sins of the world and he proceeded to give the crowds his own personal eyewitness account of how the Spirit had descended and remained on Jesus following Christ's baptism and testified again that Jesus is the Son of God.

this was the one whom John described as not being worthy to untie the strap of his sandal and he is of course correct for no one is worthy to untie the strap of the Creator's the Savior of the world's sandal.

As we enter this communion season there will be many people who like John will say they are unworthy and therefore that's why they don't come forward to the Lord's table.

[ 9 : 00 ] But if that's your argument friends the truth is that none of us are worthy to come and no one will ever be worthy through their own efforts to come but the wonderful good news is that Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was worthy and through him we can come and indeed it's he himself who invites us to come to do this in remembrance of him.

when we allow Christ to untie the bindings of our sin when we allow Jesus to cleanse us from our sin he releases us into the freedom that he alone can give he enables us to be the people that God created us to be people who will glorify God and enjoy him forever people who will follow Christ's example and serve their brothers and sisters through deeds of kindness acts of love and humility towards one another people who in obedience will obey his command and come to his table and do this in remembrance of him.

John correctly recognized and declared himself to be unworthy but he still even in his unworthy state testified to everyone who would listen that Jesus was the son of God that Jesus was the Messiah that Jesus came to take away the sins of the world God John didn't allow his unworthiness to halt him or hold him back or restrain him for doing the work that God had called him to do.

John didn't allow his unworthiness to tie him up and hold him back and bind him from obeying his God. Friends as we come to the Lord's table we come recognizing our own unworthiness but as we come like John we do so testifying to Christ's worthiness we testify publicly that he has washed us from life's sin and released us from sin's bondage and we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

John further told those of his disciples who were concerned when they saw that Jesus when he started his ministry was getting a lot more disciples than John was but John wasn't into the numbers game and he rather rejoiced in the fact that people were turning to Jesus and following him and he declared Jesus must increase and I must decrease as we come to the Lord's table that too must be our motto that we must decrease while Christ alone increases but later on when imprisoned by Herod John had doubts he was human like you and I he was subjected to incarceration that none of us will probably ever have to experience so he sends disciples to Jesus asking are you the one who was to come or should we be looking for someone else

[ 12 : 56 ] Jesus ministry wasn't panning out the way that John had anticipated but Jesus doesn't condemn him for his doubts rather he graciously tells the disciples to go back to John and tell them what they witnessed go and tell John what you hear go and tell John what you see the blind receive

their sight the lame walk lepers are cleansed the deaf hear the dead are raised and the poor have good news preached to them and then Jesus went on to affirm John publicly in front of the crowds saying truly I say to you among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist the man who was unworthy the man who had doubts the man who obeyed his

God and then he says yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he the man who said he was unworthy to untie Christ's sandal strap the man who had these doubts while in prison was publicly affirmed by the one who alone is worthy Jesus the saviour Jesus the redeemer Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world so how ironic is it then that here at the end of Christ's ministry as he begins his final discourse with his disciples in the middle of supper in that upper room number of hours before his arrest and crucifixion the saviour and the creator of the world stoops to wash his disciples feet having loosened the straps of their sandals and removed them the one whom no human is worthy to untie his sandals is the very one who chooses to get down on his knees and perform the most menial of tasks reserved for the lowest of slaves so secondly coming back to the question we asked at the start why did

Jesus do it why did Jesus strip off and go down on his knees and untie the sandals of his disciples and wash their feet the context in which this action is recorded by John's gospel is believed to be the same occasion which the synoptic writers record Christ's institution of the Lord's supper and look in his account speaks of the disciples having an argument and a dispute among them over who of them was the greatest and it's in the middle of their arguing and bickering that Jesus quietly gets up rose from supper laid aside his outer garments taking a towel tidied around his waist poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with a towel that was wrapped around him the incident occurs during

Christ's final discourse with these hand picked disciples and it's a dramatic parable which is both a symbolic enactment of what's soon about to happen when he wouldn't just cleanse their feet from the mud and dust of the Palestinian roads but he would cleanse those who believed in him from their sin by the shedding of his own precious blood on Calvary's cross while it's a symbolic enactment at the same time Christ's foot washing is an action that is a supreme example that he leaves for his people to follow and to emulate normally the host would have had a servant on duty to wash the feet of his guests before they even took their place at table yes they would all have bathed as they prepared and got ready to come to the meal but travelling on the dusty roads their feet would have been contaminated and dirty necessitating their washing to cleanse and refresh the guests before they had communion with their host before they feasted and enjoyed conversation and fellowship with the one who invited them and it's in the absence of the duty servant none of the disciples will take it upon themselves in order to stoop and serve one another they obviously thought the task was beneath them they were much more interested in jockeying for the position of being the greatest in

Christ's kingdom and Jesus may well have let this argument run on and left it to the middle of the meal before rising to wash their feet in order to emphasize all the more strongly the importance of the lesson that he was teaching them Jesus concern was not for himself as he gets up to do the task but for the mundane needs of this disparate group of argumentative disciples the full understanding of his actions will not become clear until following the resurrection and the coming of the spirit at Pentecost his action in cleansing their feet points forward to the cleansing sacrifice at Calvary when the one who is worthy the lamb of

[ 19 : 38 ] God God's Passover lamb deals with and pays for the penalty of sins of the world in the verbs used in both verse 4 and verse 12 where it speaks of him taking off his outer garments and laying them aside and then taking them up again the same verbs that were used earlier in John 10 when Christ speaks of laying down his life and then taking it up again his cleansing action and washing feet closely parallels the cleansing action of washing away the sin of the world through his sacrificial death it appears that most of the disciples allowed Christ to proceed and provide the service without comment no doubt they were embarrassed into silence that their master should be doing such a menial task but then when he gets to

Peter Peter through to form strongly objects to Jesus even touching his feet but Jesus tells him that he will understand in due course what is happening but it will be later Peter but Peter being Peter is emphatic and he says you'll never ever wash my feet and then Jesus says to him and explains to them that only those who are washed by him can expect to have any share or part with him in verse 8 friends it's exactly the same for us today unless Jesus has washed and cleansed us from our sin

in this life we can have no part or share with him in the life that is to come it's by coming in repentance by confessing our sin by allowing

Jesus to cleanse us of it that we are adopted into God's family and made to be joint heirs with Christ from Peter refusing adamantly not to have Jesus touch his feet and on hearing this he does his usual backward somersault to the opposite extreme wanting Jesus not only to wash his feet but to wash his hands and his head as well Jesus has to explain that when you've had a bath there's no need for anything further apart from your feet to be washed and friends like Peter our personal pride needs to perish if we're to allow Christ to cleanse us from our sins only Jesus can wash away our sins with his blood with his atoning sacrifice which was a once and for all event never to be repeated but you who are

Christians know all too well that we still live in a fallen world we still have the dregs of sin within and we need to be washed daily of the contamination that we pick up on life's journey we need to be washed daily as we engage with the world around us we need the contaminations removed from our feet just as Jesus was washing their feet here and we do that by coming daily and confessing our shortcomings and seeking God's grace and his mercy in our cleansing as we prepare and examine ourselves this communion season the spirit himself will reveal to us any unconfessed sin in our lives that needs to be dealt with he'll show us any relationships that need to be repaired because

Jesus again stoops down to release us stoops down to cleanse us unworthy sinners that we are the disciples all obviously expected someone other than themselves to do the job but what a surprise they got when someone with a capital S actually did it what a surprise they got when their own master did the job that one of them should have done imagine the uneasiness they must have felt as the Lord went from one to the other washing their feet and taking off their sandals and even then none of them jumped up to offer to help or to intervene and take over the bowl and the towel and complete the task for them it's interesting to note that there's no record that even after he had completed the job there's no word of any of the disciples reciprocating and offering to wash [ 25 : 11 ] Christ's feet which would have been as much need of soothing and refreshment from the dust of the day as theirs were none of them were worthy of this grace that was poured out over these dirty feet yet Jesus didn't miss out any of them he didn't miss out Peter who he knew would deny him nor did he miss out Judas who he knew would betray him but Jesus alone is the one that is worthy to untie us and to cleanse us from our sin Jesus alone can release us from sin's grip he deals with each in turn even Judas the traitor the lord of all creation demonstrates his grace in the most basic and practical of ways stooping and getting onto his knees and washing their polluted feet the same hands that formed humanity from the dust of the earth untied their sandals and washed the dust and the mud from them and gently dried them the hands that reached down to pick up the little children and bless them the hands that untied the eyes of the blind so that they could see the hands that untied the legs of the lame so that they could walk the hands that untied the ears of the deaf that they could hear the hands that released the lepers from their crippling disease the hand that took the hand of

Jairus' daughter and raised her back to life on tying death's grip upon her were the very same hands that untied the unworthy disciples sandal straps and washed their feet the same hands that washed their feet that soon would be pierced and nailed to a Roman cross the same hands that would shed blood that would cleanse from the sin that besets us all the same hands that save that entitle us to share with him in glory the same pierced hands that are held out to each one who knows and loves him to come to his table this weekend and share in his remembrance and these same hands that invite us to come to his table will be the hands that in future release our groaning creation from its bondage to decay and release it into the freedom of the glory of the children of God as Paul told the Romans this is why our creator Lord laid aside not just his garments but laid aside his equality with God and stripped off his eternal heavenly riches and made himself nothing taking on the form of a servant taking on the form of the lowest of servants becoming obedient to death on a cross so that he might stoop and untie us from our sin releasing us to declare that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father Christ also washed the disciples feet to give us an example that having released us and washed us of our sin we also should forgive and serve others as

Christ has done for us we need to be ready to pick up the towel to take the basin with water and do as Jesus did for one another in conclusion then in examining ourselves before the one who alone is

worthy do we need to remove Jesus to come this evening and remove our footwear and wash away the filth and the grime of the world that has contaminated us since the last communion season the wrong thoughts the harsh words the hypocrisy the angry outbursts the envy then come as you are allow Jesus to untie you and cleanse you from your failings so that you may join with your brethren at our

Lord's table in remembrance of him maybe you've been struggling to come in obedience to his invitation perhaps you've been struggling for years but you've been bound by the devil's lies and his accusations that you're not good enough that you aren't worthy as if we said none of us are worthy but Jesus is and if that's where you are tonight then come now to our Lord and allow him to untie you from all that is holding you back for he alone is worthy he came to untie us come then publicly profess this communion season confess with John the Baptist and your fellow Christians your own unworthiness testify with them to

[ 31 : 27 ] Christ's worthiness and share with them at his table in his remembrance I pray that this communion season you may all know the touch of the one who alone is worthy releasing from all that binds to his God to follow his example in reaching out to those in need of being freed from their sin with the good news that Jesus is worthy that Jesus is able that Jesus is willing to release and to cleanse them may you demonstrate your love for your saviour by being together with his people around his table and may each of us always be ready always be willing to serve one another for his glory and as we do so our

Lord will be glorified and we will be blessed I pray it may be so for his honour and for his glory Amen and as again bow in prayer let us pray our loving heavenly father we do indeed thank you for your word and we thank you for this example that you have left us recorded by John in his gospel reminding us that you are worthy you alone are the one who is worthy to release and untie us from sin's bindings to release us into the people that we are meant to be cleansed and washed by your shed blood Lord help us as we live our lives to keep our focus on you to follow your example to reach out with your love to those around us in the world who are still lost and in darkness bound by sin with the good news that

Jesus is worthy and is willing and able to release and cleanse from all sins filthiness and enable us to be prepared for that feast in glory when life here is finished bless your people here we pray may each one have a fresh experience of being cleansed by you even this communion season we pray in Jesus name for his sake amen our closing praise is taken again from Psalm 119 Psalm 119 and it's page 404 singing verses 57 to 64 thou my sure portion art alone which I did choose O Lord I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word with my whole heart

I did entreat thy face and favour free according to thy gracious word being merciful to me to the end of verse 64 my companion to all those who fear and obey O Lord thy mercy fills the earth teach me thy laws I pray let us stand and praise God all have heard cold would The Lord, the Lord, which I did choose, O Lord, I have a song that said that I won't give thy holy word.

With my whole heart I did and dreamed thy face and favored me.

[ 36 : 28 ] According to thy gracious form, be merciful to me.

I thought upon thy former ways, and did my life well try.

And to thy test upon me still, I did and turned high.

I did not sing nor linger long, as those that's not full are.

But mystery in thy laws to keep myself, I did prepare.

[ 38 : 12 ] That all will make me wrong, yet I, thy grace, it was night.

I'll rise up with thy deed to praise.

I am companion to the Lord's death.

I am companion to the Lord's death. I am companion to the Lord's death. O Lord, thy mercy fills me and teach me and I wash my grave.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.

According to the... Amen.

[ 39 : 49 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.