



Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

John 13:1 - 17



Jesus humbly served His disciples by washing their feet. By His actions, Jesus taught two important lessons. First, we learn how we should serve others. Next, Jesus taught that we must confess our sins to God every day.

Day #1: Who is Greatest?

Jesus told the disciples that He was going to give His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus knew that very soon Judas was going to lead the Pharisees to Him so they could arrest Him. While they were still at the table eating the Last Supper, Jesus told His twelve disciples that one of them was about to betray Him. The disciples were troubled to hear this. They began to ask which one of them it would be. Soon their thoughts were completely on themselves.

† They also started to argue. They disagreed about which of them was thought to be the most important person. - Luke 22:24

It is hard to imagine that just moments after Jesus announced His own death, the disciples were thinking only of themselves. Jesus ended their argument by teaching them they should not want power and greatness in this life.

Jesus told them, "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is more important, the one who sits at the table or the one who serves? The one who sits at the table, of course. But not here! For I am among you as one who serves." - Luke 22:25-27

Jesus explained that His followers should be different from those in the world. Worldly people love power, and when they have it, they often treat others badly. Jesus told the disciples they should serve others, for He, Himself, had come to serve. Then Jesus told His men about the great reward that awaited them.

You have stood by me during my troubles. And I give you a kingdom, just as my Father gave Me a kingdom. Then you will eat and drink at my table in My kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. - Luke 22:28-29

Jesus wanted the disciples to see that their reward was not power and fame on earth, because that would not last. Their reward would be given to them in heaven. This is a principle that is taught over and over in the Bible (Luke 14:11, James 4:10). Earlier, Jesus put it this way:

The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. - Matthew 23:11-12

* God will reward those who are humble. Do you seek to be lifted up now, or do you consider others better than yourself (Philippians 2:3)?

Day #2: Serve Others

We saw yesterday that Jesus' disciples discussed which of them was the greatest. This discussion occurred several times (Matthew 20:21, Luke 9:46, 22:24). The disciples had heard Jesus teach on this subject many times (Matthew 5:5, Luke 9:48). Yet, they continued to miss the point. The disciples could not seem to grasp the importance of humility when Jesus told them about it. In His last hours with them, Jesus did something to *show* them this lesson. Maybe this time they would take it to heart.

While Jesus was eating with His disciples in the upper room, He did something very unusual. It was so out of place that it made His disciples feel very awkward.

† So He (Jesus) got up from the meal and took off His outer clothes. He wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a large bowl. Then He began to wash his disciples' feet. He dried them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. - John 13:4-5

Foot washing was not an unusual thing in Bible times. Back then, roads were not paved as they are now. Roads were made of dirt that had been packed down over time. Not only were the roads dusty, but they were dirty from garbage and the waste of animals that traveled there. Without cars, most traveling was done on foot. People did not wear shoes like the shoes we wear today. Most people wore sandals, and the poorest people had no shoes at all. Therefore, even if someone started out their day being clean, by the evening meal, their feet would be very dirty. No one would want to eat their meal with dirty feet all around. So, the feet of the guests were washed.

What was unusual about Jesus' actions was WHO was doing the washing. It was the custom that the lowliest servant would do the very icky job of washing the feet of those who came to eat (1 Samuel 25:41). Everyone in the upper room knew that Jesus was the greatest among them. He was a great Teacher, He performed miracles, and by that time, most of them were convinced He was the Messiah. It would have been unheard of for the most important guest at the table to wash another's feet. But Jesus had come to teach things that were opposite from the world's ways. After *telling* the disciples that they should serve others, He then *showed* them how.

Simon Peter had a very strong reaction to Jesus' actions. We will look at this tomorrow. When Jesus had finished washing the disciples' feet, He said these words:

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. - John 13:14-15

* Jesus said that His followers should follow His example. Today, we rarely have the opportunity to wash someone's feet. What can you do to serve someone else? Think of at least one way to serve someone **this week**. Make a habit out of serving others.

Day #3: Peter's Reaction

Jesus had already washed the feet of some of His disciples when He came to Simon Peter.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, "Lord, are you going to wash

Day #3 continued:

my feet?"


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

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." - John 13:6-8

Peter was the disciple who always spoke what was on his mind. He was the first to announce that he believed Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 16:16). When Jesus came to him, he refused to let Jesus wash his feet. Peter knew that foot washing was a servant's job. Peter did not want the Messiah to serve him! But Jesus told Peter that it was necessary.

Peter certainly did not know what He was saying when he told Jesus not to wash his feet! At this time, Jesus was using foot washing as a symbol. The washing of his feet was a picture of coming to Jesus every day to ask forgiveness for the sins Peter had committed. Even though Peter had placed his faith in Jesus, he continued to sin every day. This is the same for all believers (1 John 1:8). The Bible teaches that the sins we commit trap us and keep us from doing God's will (Hebrews 12:1). The only way we can be free of our sin is to take it to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).


Hebrews 12:1 says that our sins "so easily entangle us." Imagine a beautiful garden. Now imagine ugly, thorn-filled weeds that grow up between the flowers. If you went to the garden every day and pulled the weeds while they were tiny sprouts, they would have very little effect on the garden. Then the garden would thrive. However, if you were to delay going to the garden to pull the weeds, what do you think would happen? In just a couple of weeks, the weeds would start to grow all around the flowers. In a month's time, the weeds would multiply, and their roots would grow deeper and stronger. The longer you waited, the more damage the weeds would do. Just like weeds in a garden, if we allow sin to remain in our lives, the sin will grow stronger and multiply. The longer we hold on to our sin, the more damage it will do in our lives, and the harder it will be to get rid of. Then we will not be able to do the things God wants us to do.

 The only way to get rid of our sin is to confess it to God. Only He can wash our sins away (Psalm 51:2). Remember to keep a "short list" with God. Confess your sins every day.

But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, He will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure. - 1 John 1:9

Day #4: Symbols

There was one more thing that Peter had to learn that day in the upper room. Remember, Jesus assured Peter that it was necessary to wash his feet.

 *Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me."*

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" - John 13:8b-9

Peter said that if Jesus had to wash him, then he wanted Jesus to wash all of him! Jesus gave Peter an interesting response.

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs to wash only his feet. The rest of his body is clean. And you are clean." - John 13:10b


Let's look at the original Greek language used in these verses. The word used for *wash* when Jesus washed the disciples' feet was **nipw**. It means to wash just a part of the body such as the hands and feet.

Day #4 continued:

The word used for *bath* was **louw**. It means to wash the whole body thoroughly. In verse 10, the word that Jesus used for *clean* was **katharos**. It means to be pure, free from sin and guilt.

By saying that Peter had bathed (**louw**, thorough cleaning), Jesus was referring to the fact that Peter was a true believer. Peter had already placed his faith in Jesus. Therefore, Peter was truly clean (**katharos**, pure, without sin). Now, Peter needed washing (**nipw**, partial washing) because of the sins that he committed every day. By confessing his sins every day, Peter would have close fellowship with Jesus, and be an effective worker for God.

Often, the Bible uses physical symbols to teach us spiritual truths. **Baptism** is an outward symbol of a person who has been made clean spiritually because they TRUST in Jesus. The baptism does not save him; his belief in Jesus saves him (John 3:18). **Foot washing** is an outward symbol of a believer's daily confessing of sin. Washing with soap and water can never take away sins. Only confessing to God will take our sins away (1 John 1:9). **Unwashed feet** is a symbol of a believer trying to walk with the Lord, study the Bible, pray, or serve God, while that person knows he has sin in his life. We cannot have a right relationship with God if we are choosing to sin, without turning away from it.


 Do not confuse the symbol with the real thing (Colossians 2:17). We must first place our faith in Jesus. Then, we must confess our sins daily.

Day #5: Confess Quickly

Have you ever purposely disobeyed your parents? Your disobedience does not change the reality of your relationship. Your parents are still your parents, and you are still their child. But, your disobedience has put a strain on the fellowship between you. Suddenly, you can't talk heart to heart or have fun together. Things are not right, and you must be restored. Restoration usually happens when you admit you have done wrong, you tell your parents you are sorry, and you try not to disobey again. This is similar to our relationship with God.


Just as the dirt and filth on the feet of ancient travelers was offensive to others at the dining table, the filth of our sin is offensive to God. When a believer sins, he or she is still God's child. But, if we are unwilling to repent, or turn away from our sin, it will affect our fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:2). We see a very clear picture of this in the Old Testament king, David.

King David was the most beloved king of Israel. God called him a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). God blessed King David. He won many military victories and became a hero of his people (1 Samuel 18:6-7). However, at one time, King David sinned against God by stealing another man's wife and having her husband killed (2 Samuel 12:9). David did not admit his sin to God. This unconfessed sin weighed very heavily on King David. He became physically sick (Psalm 38:3-7). He was in deep despair (Psalm 38:8). He was unable to talk to God or hear from God (Psalm 38:13-15). Finally, King David confessed his sins to God.

 *When I kept silent about my sin,
my body became weak
because I groaned all day long.
Day and night*

*Your heavy hand punished me.
I became weaker and weaker
as I do in the heat of summer.*

*Then I admitted my sin to You.
I didn't cover up the wrong I had done.
I said, "I will admit my lawless acts to the Lord."
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. - Psalm 32:3-5*

 Do not make the terrible mistake that David made! Do not think that you can hold on to your sin and still live a fruitful life. Confess your sin to God immediately. God is faithful to forgive every time (1 John 1:9).