

32. Learning to Wash One Another's Feet

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to wait for one another. We saw that to wait means to be patient with one another. If we are still driven by fear we will drive others. If we have taken root in the love of Christ, then we will lead others with patience and kindness. As a result, people will be drawn to Christ because they see love in action. Today, we are going to learn about another way that we help our physical and spiritual children learn to lead others in love as we learn what it means to wash one another's feet.

In John 13:13-15, we read, "You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Here, we see that to "wash one another's feet" speaks of serving one another in a way that will produce a feeling of acceptance and comfort. As we look at this passage, we will see some key principles to share with our physical and spiritual children about what it means to wash one another's feet.

We find the background for this event in Luke 22:8-13 where we read, "And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.' So they said to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare?' And He said to them, 'Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'' Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready.' So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover." In this passage, we see that Christ and the disciples were going to eat the Passover in a room where Peter and John had prepared the meal. This meant that the owner of the house was probably having the Passover in another part of the house with his family. As a result, he was not there to wash the feet of those using the upper room.

Any of the disciples could have chosen to volunteer to wash the feet of the other disciples, so Christ gave them time to volunteer. However, none of them volunteered. Then, John 13:1-4 says, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself." First, we see that Christ loved His disciples to the end.

Second, we see that Christ waited until the supper was over to give each disciple the opportunity to volunteer to wash the feet of the others. Peter and John had prepared the dinner but apparently did not feel that they should also wash the feet. The other disciples thought the opposite way. They apparently thought that either Peter or John should be the one to wash their feet since they were the two that had prepared the Passover. Whatever the reason, we see that none of the twelve volunteered to wash the feet of the others.

Third, Christ chose to show His love by His example. Christ rose from supper and laid aside His outer coat. John 13:5 says, “After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” Christ silently began to work His way around the table washing the feet of the disciples as He went. Of course, feet can be dirty and smelly after a person has walked along dusty streets. Christ had chosen to take the task that was normally reserved for a slave if there was a slave in the house. As Christ went around the table, no one said anything until Christ came to Peter. They may have all felt guilty since Christ was their Master. However, each one just let Christ wash his feet until Christ came to Peter. Peter could not keep quiet and questioned why Christ was going to wash his feet.

Fourth, we see the embarrassment of Peter when He realized what Christ was going to do. John 13:8-11 says, “Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!’ Jesus said to him, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean.’” Peter had been one of the two that prepared the dinner and may have felt that he really should have volunteered and so he said that Christ would never wash his feet.

Fifth, we see that Christ used His actions to explain the difference between washing and cleansing. Christ was talking about spiritual washing and cleansing but illustrated it by physical washing and cleansing. The disciples had earlier each had a physical bath. As a result, they only needed to have their feet cleansed from the dirt that had gotten on their feet as they walked along the streets. 1 John 1:7-9 says, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Our sin of unbelief is washed away at the moment of salvation but we need the daily cleansing from the sins that we continue to commit after we become Christians to maintain our fellowship with the Lord.

Sixth, Christ made it clear to Judas both here and again a short time later that he knew what Judas was going to do because of the fact that Judas had never had his sin of unbelief washed away. Christ continued to show His love to Judas later that night even though Judas had never repented of his sin. Matthew 26:48-50 says, “Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.’ Immediately he went up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him. But Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, why have you come?’ Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him.” Between the time Judas kissed Christ and the time those with him laid their hands on Christ, we see that Christ used those few moments to call Judas, “Friend”. Judas saw the love of Christ for him even at the moment he betrayed Christ. Since Christ never sinned, these words to Judas were words of genuine love.

However, the main lesson that Christ was teaching by his actions was shown by what He said after Christ had finished washing the feet of the disciples. John 13:13-17 says, “You call me Teacher

and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” In these verses, we see that Christ applied His actions to the lives of the disciples.

Seventh, Christ said that it was true that he was their Teacher and Lord. Christ said that even though He was their Teacher and Lord, He had done what He did to give them an example to follow. Christ encouraged them to follow His example and wash the feet of one another. Christ said that a servant is not greater than His master. Christ as the Master had chosen to provide Himself as an example of the fact that those who are teachers and leaders are to serve both Christians and even non-Christians like Judas. He showed that it does not matter what title a person has. Instead, we are all to serve one another even if it means doing the dirty and smelly work of washing feet.

Then, Christ shared one more key lesson with the disciples that night. As John 13:17 says, “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Many Christian leaders know that Christ has called us to be servant-leaders. Many even faithfully teach passages like Mark 10:42-45 where we read, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Yet, at the same time, many of these teachers, pastors and other leaders feel like they are not experiencing the blessing of the Lord in their lives and ministries.

In John 13:17, the word that is translated “blessed” is the same word that Christ used repeatedly when He gave the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Christ told the disciples that they would never experience blessing as leaders if they only talked about serving others. Christ said that they would experience blessing as they began to make it a daily practice in their lives to serve others.

You can tell your physical and spiritual children about the importance of serving others and your words will not change their lives at all. In contrast, you can show your physical and spiritual children how to serve others by the way that you serve them. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Love is best shown by actions. That is why Christ chose to show His disciples how to love one another by His action of washing their feet. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your physical and spiritual children how to be blessed by serving others in love.