

52. Jesus Washed the Feet of the Disciples

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to speak the Word of God to others with love so that they also will have the opportunity to know the love of God and receive everlasting life. In our topic today, we are going to see that Jesus also gave us an example of how to love one another by learning to follow by His example as He washed the feet of the disciples.

In John 13:1 we read, “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.” Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to die. Jesus knew that in less than 24 hours His body would be taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb. One-third of the book of John (seven chapters) covers that 24-hour period. We see that Jesus gave some of His most important teachings to His disciples during the first part of that time as chapters 13 through 16 cover His time with the disciples in the Upper Room and on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane where He would pray to the Father. Then, chapter 17 is His prayer to the Father.

The Jews observed the Passover Feast every year to remember how the death angel had passed over the people of Israel in the land of Egypt. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” In this verse, we see that Jesus was sacrificed for our sins so that we also could have life instead of death. As a result, the hour had come for Jesus to die to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus knew that His future time with the disciples on this earth would be very limited because He was going to depart from this world to return to the Father.

However, Jesus was going to make good use of these last hours with the disciples as He prepared them for the future. We see that Jesus loved His disciples to the end. The word translated “end” means *the termination or the time when something ceases to be*. Jesus knew that before this night was over He would be arrested and taken for trial. The next morning, He would be crucified. Because of His love for the disciples, Jesus spent these last hours ministering to them.

The disciples had no idea what was going to happen that night. In fact, Luke 22:24 tells us, “Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.” The following verses in Luke 22 tell us that Jesus also taught them about serving one another that night. However, Jesus did more than just talk. Jesus also gave them an example of service to one another. John 13:2-5 says, “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. 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.” Jesus had given the disciples plenty of time to wash the feet of one another but they were too busy talking about who would be the greatest to even think of serving one another.

The meal was over and their feet were unwashed. Usually, foot washing was done by a servant as

soon as people came into the house but there was no servant and none of the disciples were ready to humble themselves and wash the feet of one another. Meanwhile, all that Judas was thinking about was his plan to betray Jesus just a few hours later. Jesus knew that humility was one very important lesson that the disciples needed to learn before He returned to the Father. He also wanted to teach them by example the importance of the daily cleansing of sin. As a result, Jesus got up from supper and laid aside His outer robe. Jesus then took a towel and attached it to Himself. Next, Jesus took a basin and filled it with water.

Then, Jesus began to go around the table and wash the feet of the disciples. After He had washed the feet of a disciple, He would wipe those feet with the towel. It was a common practice for a slave to wash the feet of the people when they came into a house because the roads in Israel were dusty and dirty. In Luke, we see that this discussion about who would be greatest came just after Jesus had broken the bread and passed the cup around after the supper. Since the supper had ended, Jesus probably began to wash the feet while the disciples were talking about who would be the greatest. Suddenly, the actions of Jesus caused the room to be filled with silence as Jesus moved from disciple to disciple.

We read what happened when Jesus came to Peter. John 13:6-11 tells us what happened at that moment, “Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’ 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.’” This would become an event that Peter would never forget.

Jesus was dealing with the pride of Peter and the other disciples as He washed their feet. They were learning by example from Jesus that their question should not be about who would be the greatest. Instead, their attitude was to be one of humility. Peter was probably very embarrassed by the fact that Jesus was about to wash his feet and that is why he said, “You shall never wash my feet!” Later, Peter was probably thinking about this event as He wrote 1 Peter 5:5-7, “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” Peter had learned the hard way that God resists the proud because of the embarrassment that he felt that night.

However, Jesus also had other very important lessons that He wanted to teach the disciples that night. Jesus had just said to Peter, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” That is why Jesus answered, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Peter showed His complete lack of understanding by then saying, “Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head!” We see that Peter had changed his thinking very quickly when He heard the words of Jesus. Suddenly, He was now ready for a complete bath if that was what was needed

to have a part with Jesus. Here, we see that Peter had no ability to understand a spiritual truth on His own. That spiritual truth had to be explained to him by Jesus. That same thing is true for us and that is why Jesus would say a little later that evening in John 14:16-17, ““And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.””

In 1 Corinthians 2:9 we read, ““...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”” In this verse, we see that spiritual understanding cannot come from the things that we see, the things that we hear or the things that we develop from our own thoughts. Instead, spiritual understanding must be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:10 says, ““But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”” That is why Jesus went on to explain the spiritual truth that Peter could not understand on his own.

We see that Jesus went on to explain to Peter why he needed his feet washed. Jesus said those who are bathed only need to wash their feet. 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.”” At the moment of salvation, all of our sins, past, present and future, are washed away and blotted out. That brings us into relationship with God and we become clean and become His children. However, we still continue to sin day by day as we go through life. Those sins hinder our fellowship with Christ. We need that daily cleansing to restore our fellowship with Christ. That cleansing happens as we confess our sins.

Jesus also needed to explain one more lesson because none of the disciples knew that Judas would betray Him. However, they would suddenly see that happen later that evening. That is why Jesus told the disciples that not all of them were clean. Judas had pretended to be a follower of Jesus and deceived all of the other disciples. In the same way, we may have some people who profess to be Christians but have never received Him. That is why 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, ““Examine yourselves *as to* whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.”” At times, we need to say that same thing to others.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the need for daily cleansing in their own lives. This is the key for them in really getting to know Jesus because that is what makes it possible for them to enjoy fellowship with the Lord moment by moment. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to develop a growing fellowship with the Lord.