

John 13.1-17 / COB / 01.04.15

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** Today we return to the gospel of John. You might turn to John 13 in your Bible.
- † This passage relates to us something very strange: that on his last night of life, Jesus washed the feet of his apostles. Why would he do that? What did it mean? What does it mean for us?
- Some churches take foot washing to be a third ordinance for the church, like water baptism and communion. So they regularly have everyone come up for foot washing, to symbolically be cleansed by Christ.
 - Others don't take it that far, but do believe that Jesus wants us to wash each other's feet today, and so that is a regular practice in their church and small groups.
 - Today, we will discover together why Jesus did this on his last night, what it symbolized to him, and what it implies for us.
 - It will help to keep in mind how John organized his gospel. Chapters 13-17 explain in advance the significance of what is about to happen with the crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven of Jesus. So whatever is going on in our passage, it has to fit that literary context, it is part of that explanation.
 - Let's pray and then we'll see what Jesus has for us today...

Exposition

[Slide 2: upper room] John 13.1 NET: **Just before the Passover feast, Jesus knew that his time had come to depart [or literally in Greek, to pass over] from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now loved them to the very end.**

- † I appreciate John's frequent play on words in this gospel, and I am sad it is not brought out more in English translations. This is especially true in this case, because there is theological significance.
- Passover was a festival celebrating God's deliverance during the exodus. God decreed that all the first born sons in Egypt would die in one night, but the Jewish families could be delivered from this death by the blood of a sacrificial lamb, which they would spread over their front doorway as a covering. God told them afterward to celebrate this deliverance every year with a meal of a sacrificial lamb.
 - When we first started studying in the gospel of John, we heard John the Baptist proclaim that Jesus was the Lamb of God [1.29, 36] who takes away the sin of the world. God had told the Jews to celebrate Passover because it was symbolic of the deliverance God was going to bring through the blood of Christ.
 - Now, in John 13, it was the time of Passover, Jesus knew he was about to pass over from this world to the Father, by becoming the sacrificial Passover lamb who would bring spiritual deliverance through his shed blood which would cover his believers.
 - John also used this word in 5.24, to quote Jesus saying that people would pass over from spiritual death to spiritual life by believing in him.

† This picture, by the way, is an example of a large upper room in a wealthy family's house in Jerusalem. It is possible Jesus and his apostles were eating in such a room.

[Slide 3: painting] John 13.2-4: The evening meal was in progress [or, perhaps, was being produced], and the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he should betray Jesus. Because Jesus knew that the Father had handed all things over to him, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, he got up from the meal, removed his outer clothes, took a towel and tied it around himself.

† I was going to act this out today, but I figured if I stripped to my loin cloth as you saw Jesus do in the video, we might have pandemonium. I also figured it was too cold in here for me, even with the heat on, me being from Florida and all. Perhaps they had a good fire going in the room in Jerusalem, where the spring temperatures would be in the fifties at night.

- By the way, Mark [14.17] seems to indicate that only the twelve apostles were with Jesus at this supper. In the video, they used a very attractive Mary, so they wanted her in as many scenes as possible, but most likely Jesus did not strip to his loin cloth in front of any women.

† Verses 2-4 are all one long sentence in Greek, implying several connections. It is *because* Satan has already corrupted Judas, and *because* Jesus knew his identity as the Son of God, his destination of returning to Heaven, and his authority from God the Father – *because* of all that – he got up and replaced his clothes with a towel that was long enough to wrap around him and still be useful for wiping things. Hmmm.

[Slide 4: U table] John 13.5-6: He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel he had wrapped around himself. Then he came to Simon Peter. Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

† At a feast like this, they would all recline around a U-shaped table, leaning on an elbow with their feet extended away from the table. So Jesus would have easy access to their feet. They probably sat up on their cushions as he came around.

† The word order in Peter's incredulous question suggests an emphasis on "you" and "my": **"Lord, are *you* washing *my* feet?"**

[Slide 5: sculpture] John 13.7-9: Jesus replied, "You do not understand what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!"

† You have to love Peter's exuberance! It comes across in all four gospels.

- First he says, "You *certainly* will not *ever* wash my feet!" and then he wants Jesus to wash his hands and head too! Peter might not fully understand what Jesus is doing or saying, but he knows he wants a share with Jesus. He was all in, however weird it was, if that was what it took to be with Jesus.

- † To fully grasp the impact of this scene, we have to understand the cultural context. People walked around in open sandals on dusty roads, so they usually arrived somewhere with dirty feet, even if they had bathed just before leaving.
 - For this reason, the host of a supper like this would provide a basin of water, which could be poured over the feet of a guest, into a catch basin, so the guest would have clean feet for the meal. The custom was for the guest to pour the water for himself [like we wash our hands], unless the host was wealthy enough to own slaves, in which case the slaves might wash the guest's feet.
 - Never would a Jewish man think of washing someone else's feet. Never. This was the work of a menial, non-Jewish slave, the lowest of the low in this society. When Jesus stripped down to his loin cloth and wrapped himself with a towel, he assumed the dress of a slave. That alone would have stupefied his friends into silence. Then he actually began acting like a slave, going around the table and washing their feet. To the disciples, this would be incomprehensible for any Jewish man, let alone for a respected Rabbi who was their teacher and mentor or master.
 - We have the luxury of reflecting on this from the outside. We know the Son of God had already done something similar, when he divested himself of divine privileges to take the form of human flesh. That required more humility, was a bigger step down, than for a Rabbi to act like a slave. But the disciples could not see this yet.

- † I thought about demonstrating foot washing today, even if I did not strip to my loin cloth. I have demonstrated it before, in small groups for adults and youth. I can tell you, it is awkward!
 - Think how you would feel if I asked you to come up here right now, so I could wash your feet. If a servant washed your feet, you might feel it was a privilege; people get pedicures and don't find it awkward. But if your pastor was doing washing your feet or your boss at work, then it would be as awkward for you as it would be for me. This is what the disciples were feeling.

- † **[Slide 6: 13.8]** While at this supper, Jesus had less than one day left to live. Every moment is precious, every moment needs to be allocated for exactly the right purpose. Knowing this, what does Jesus do? He washes people's feet! Why would he spend his time doing that?
 - Keeping in mind the purpose of this section of the gospel, the key is in v.8. Peter was thinking in terms of socially normal behavior when he objected to Jesus washing his feet, but Jesus answered Peter, **"If I do not wash you, [then] you do not have a share with me."** That terminology in Greek suggests reference to an inheritance or to blessings in the end times; a little later, Jesus would suggest this means that they will be with him in God the Father's heavenly house. All of that speaks to eternal life with Christ.
 - So this physical cleansing was symbolic of spiritual cleansing. Jesus knew they would not understand this right then, as he said in v.7, but he is giving them a provocative illustration that will remain in their minds, and thus teach them something after the crucifixion and resurrection.
 - In the process of his sacrificial death, Jesus paid the penalty for their sins, he took the punishment from God the Father that they deserved. He could bear all that condemnation because he was the divine Son of God; his sacrifice satisfied God the Father, because Jesus was the uniquely perfectly pure human being, the pure sacrificial lamb.

- † **[Slide 7: cleansing]** We think of this as spiritual cleansing for two reasons.

- First, because of the sacrifice of Christ, God the Father declares believers to be cleansed and righteous in his sight. We call that “justification.”
- Second, because of the sacrifice of Christ, the Holy Spirit brings to believers a new spiritual birth that begins the process of a true cleansing of character so we become like Christ, we become the image of God we were created and saved to be. We call this “sanctification.”
- So when Jesus washed their feet, he was giving them a memorable symbol of what he was going to do for them on the cross.
- Because he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in Heaven, Jesus cannot come wash your feet, but he already has died for you. Have you accepted that spiritual cleansing in faith? Not only have you put your faith in Christ – that certainly is the first step – but also have you begun to see yourself in this light, that you are cleansed that you are a righteous child of God? Let’s pray for a moment to accept this cleansing and thank Jesus for it.

[Slide 8: room] John 13.9-12: Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!” Jesus replied, “The one who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not every one of you.” (For Jesus knew the one who was going to betray him. For this reason he said, “Not every one of you is clean.”) So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, “Do you understand what I have done for you?”

- † There are two ways of interpreting Jesus’ response to Peter in 13.10. If Jesus is continuing to build on the symbolism we just discussed, then he was stressing here that they needed to accept the cleansing Jesus was offering.
 - Just as the disciples were clean physically but still needed Jesus to wash their feet to be ready for supper, so they were clean spiritually through their faith, but still needed to accept what Jesus would offer them through his death on the cross in order to receive the full blessings of salvation.
 - As Peter needed to accept that his master and teacher Jesus would humble himself to act like a menial slave to serve him in foot washing, they all needed to accept that their master and teacher Jesus would humble himself to die a shameful death on the cross to serve them in the crucifixion.
 - Many people today have a difficult time with the concept of the crucifixion. Even if they believe in God and believe Jesus existed, they cannot comprehend the Son of God being willing to come as a human, humbly serving others throughout his life, and then being willing to die on the cross for the sins of others. Yet to accept God’s promise of salvation, this is exactly what we need to believe.
- † It also is possible Jesus was taking advantage of the interaction with Peter to teach a second point.
 - In physical terms, the one who was clean only needed to wash the dust off his feet, not take another bath. In spiritual terms, once a person has accepted the cleansing that Christ offers in salvation, that person does not ever need to do so again. That cleansing, that justification, is permanent. But still there is an ongoing need to clean off the “dirt” that gathers as we walk through life.

- We all commit sins subsequent to receiving salvation, and in this sense we still need to turn to Jesus for cleansing. The same author, the apostle John, wrote in **1 John 1.8-9 NET: If we say we do not bear the guilt of sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous, forgiving us our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness.**
- Please right now try to grasp that if you have faith in Jesus, your cleansing before God is permanent. When you came to faith in Christ, you trusted Christ to pay the penalty for your sin, and in that moment you were forgiven and justified – declared to be righteous – permanently.
- But let’s also remember that even though God has declared us to be “not guilty” and “righteous” in his sight, we do not have permission to continue sinning. We are saved by grace, but we are saved to become obedient, to become people of God, to become reflections of his character and representatives of him here. We must try hard not to sin at all; and when we screw up, we must go to God to confess with an attitude of repentance. That will cleanse the dirt off our feet and keep our relationship with God healthy.

† Before we go on, note that Jesus washed Judas’ feet. So we see that going through the motions of something like communion or confession is not what cleanses us spiritually, it is what is in our hearts and minds, it is our ongoing faith in Christ as we experience these things. Let’s take a moment now to repentantly confess our recent sins.

[Slide 9: room] John 13.12-17: So when Jesus had washed their feet and put his outer clothing back on, he took his place at the table again and said to them, "Do you understand what I have done for you? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example— you should do just as I have done for you. I tell you the solemn truth, the slave is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent as a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

† In v.16, where the NET has “I tell you the solemn truth,” that is ἀμὴν ἀμὴν in Greek; meaning truly, truly; it’s one way Jesus begins some of his most important teachings.

- In the same verse, I wonder if Jesus is engaging in some wordplay. The word translated “messenger” here is literally ἀπόστολος, meaning “apostle,” and these men were the apostles of Jesus, the messengers or envoys he would send out to represent him to the world, write the New Testament, and set up the church.
- If Jesus their master and sender is willing to wash their feet and die for others, then they should be willing also, as the slaves and messengers of Christ. They might have been appalled to hear this: they were shocked by Jesus’ humble and sacrificial behavior, unclear about what it meant, and now heard they were to follow his example!

† **[Slide 10: example]** Our first verse today talked about Jesus’ love and now we finish with Jesus saying they should lovingly serve each other as he lovingly served them.

- The love of Jesus is not seen merely in his humble service to them in washing their feet, it is also in his willingness to sacrificially die for them on the cross. This passage shows *how* Jesus loved them to the end as it says in 13.1: he humbly and sacrificially served them, he patiently taught them, and [most importantly] he died for them.

- Next week we will continue listening to this conversation, and see that Jesus' point goes beyond washing feet. He is demonstrating God's kind of love and expects his disciples – including us – to follow his example by showing that type of love to each other.
 - Christian, biblical, love is a decision – not an emotion, a decision – to put the other person ahead of ourselves, and treat them like God treats us in Christ. In today's passage, the focus is on that love being humble and sacrificial.
- † **[Slide 11: do]** Back in John 12.47-48, Jesus condemned those who heard his words but failed to obey them. Now he emphasizes this again: his disciples are to do what he says and do like he does!
- We cannot sit here on Sunday morning and say, "Amen, we agree," and then go on living our own way. We must go out determined to live out the teachings of Jesus! Let's take a moment now to ask God for help and to pledge before God that we are willing to learn to live humbly and sacrificially for others, to patiently teach others biblical truth, and even to die for others if that is what God wants.

Conclusion

- † **[Slide 12: summary]** Let me quickly reiterate a few points.
- First, Christ died to cleanse us, to offer us spiritual cleansing that was both legal in God's court and experiential in our souls. The physical cleansing of the foot washing symbolized the spiritual cleansing Christ would offer on the cross.
 - Second, Jesus said we had to accept his washing to share in his blessings, in his inheritance. Elsewhere he said that he was the only way to God the Father. We all need salvation, because we all have fallen short of God's standards. This is the one way of salvation God has promised and the only way of salvation God has delivered: to be saved as a gift through faith in the identity and work of Jesus.
 - Third, even after salvation, we still sometimes fall into sin. Even though our sins do not change our salvation, we need to come to God in repentant confession to restore our relational intimacy with him and be cleansed of these sins.
 - Fourth, if the almighty Son of God was willing to act humbly and sacrificially by coming here as a man, serving and teaching others, and then dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, then we should be willing to act humbly and sacrificially too. Christ is our role model, he is lord of our lives, and he is the one who saved us and sends us out as his messengers, so we need to humbly and sacrificially serve each other in every aspect of life, even to the point of death.
 - This does not mean we need to wash each other's feet. We could, if that were a needed service today; but the command is more general: we are to sacrifice to help each other, even if that requires doing something that seems beneath us, something embarrassing or gross. We should live to help each other and even be willing to die for each other if that were necessary.
 - With that in mind, let's move into our time of communion...