

# The Footwashing

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[ 0 : 00 ] Hunter to hand over to you for the rest of the service. Thank you so much. Okay, well if you have your bibles, I'm going to be reading from the Gospel of John in chapter 13.

And this is probably a story you know well. This is the moment in the Last Supper when Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

So I'm going to read from John chapter 13. And I'm going to end at verse 17. So this is God's word. Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

During supper when the devil had 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 back to God, rose from supper.

[ 1 : 16 ] He laid aside his outer garment and 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.

He came to Simon Peter who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.

Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. And Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, you can have no share with me. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And Jesus said to him, the one who is bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean.

And you are clean, but not every one of you, for he knew who was to betray him. That was why he said not all of you are clean. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, do you understand what I have done to you?

You call me teacher and Lord and you are right 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 also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

[ 2 : 44 ] If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Amen. This is God's word. Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this evening and we pray that you would give us eyes to see your word, that you would show us more of your glory, more of the glory in Jesus Christ, even when he was at one of his lowest moments in ministry.

Show us more of yourself so that we can be changed. And we ask all this in your son's name.

Amen. Well, I have to say that one of the reasons that I don't envy the Gospel writers is that they had this impossible task of summarizing the life of the greatest man who had ever lived in something like 10 pages.

All of the Gospels are very short and I was walking in the water stands a few days ago and I passed a biography of Boris Johnson and that thing was something like 600 pages, but you couldn't tote around a 600 page volume in the ancient Near East.

And so someone like John had to sit down and it must have been excruciating to think, what are the stories that must go in this book and what do I have to leave out?

[ 3 : 59 ] And one of the ways that we know this is if you go read John chapter 21, John says, if we wrote down everything that we saw Jesus do and say, the whole world would not contain the books that would have to be written.

And so John is saying every sentence that I write, every story that I include and every word that I say has significance in my Gospel. It's the same as true for all the other Gospels. And that makes it

all the more interesting, that of all the stories that John could talk about and of all the amazing miracles that Jesus did, he sits down and he says, you know, I want every believer who comes after me to know what happened on that night when it was just the 12 of us in Jesus.

And I want them to know what happened when he washed our feet. And I think one of the reasons why this moment in Jesus's life must have been so significant is because it really challenged who the disciples saw Jesus was.

I mean, they knew that he was a man. I mean, they had seen him live life as a man, but they had also caught glimpses of his greatness, right? They had seen him raise the dead to life and he could calm storms with his voice.

They had seen him do spectacular things. And you have to imagine as he's getting close to the end of his life and he's warning his disciples that his time is coming to an end and they're wondering what great thing is he still going to do?

[ 5 : 33 ] What greater wonders are we going to see from God in these last moments with him? And in the last few hours that Jesus has on this earth, what does he do?

He washes his disciples' feet. And the question is why? And to understand the significance of what Jesus is doing here, you have to understand that in first century Jerusalem, washing someone's feet is more than just a friendly act of service.

During this time period, to wash another person's feet was to actually become lower than them. It was to say that you are a servant of someone else.

If a person, and I know you guys are very big on hospitality, if a person was very hospitable, what they might do is leave a water basin out so that when your guests come, they can wash their own feet.

And you need that because Jerusalem is a dirty city, the streets are made out of dirt, the animals are running up and down all day long and you can use your own imagination.

[ 6 : 41 ] People's feet get filthy and they need to be washed. But culturally, at the end of the day, to have your disciples come into your house with their dirty, grimy feet for you to wash them, that's an active service that the disciples could not have understood someone as great as Jesus could do.

They would have never expected Jesus to stoop so low. And yet there Jesus was after all the miracles and the wonders, and with only a few hours left to spare, He intentionally takes the form of a servant to his disciples. And again, the question is, why would He do that? Of all the things He could do on the last night here, why does He wash feet?

And what's clear when you read this passage is, what John later understands is Jesus washes his disciples' feet because he's teaching them a lesson.

And he's really teaching them two lessons and that's what we're going to look at tonight. He wants them to know these two things so that after he's gone and he knows he's going to leave, he wants them to remember this night and to remember these lessons and to live by them after he's gone.

And the two lessons are this.

We need to be washed and we need to serve like Christ. And that's all I want to look at tonight. In the first lesson, we need to be washed. If you look back at the text, you see the tension in the passage comes whenever Jesus is washing disciple by disciple, He's washing other feet and then he gets to Peter and in verse 6, Peter says, Lord, you wash my feet. And that's half of the sentence, right?

[ 8 : 31 ] Because we're inferring that what Peter is saying is, you wash my feet, I should be washing your feet. And Jesus answers him. He says, what I am doing, you do not understand now.

But afterward, you will understand. And then Peter says to him, you shall never wash my feet. I mean, can you imagine someone telling Jesus, you will never wash my feet so forcefully.

And notice how adamant Jesus is in his response, how adamant he is that he washes Peter's feet. He says, Jesus answered, if I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.

And I wonder if that sounds harsh to you because here Peter has been following Jesus for something like three years, day in and day out, rain and shine. And then all of a sudden Jesus speaks as if the whole relationship now hinges on this seemingly insignificant question of, will you let me wash your feet or not?

And I have to wonder, are some of the disciples who are in the room thinking, I mean, Jesus, isn't this a bit drastic that you're really going to make this all come down to whether we can wash his feet or not?

[ 9 : 43 ] And it might have been drastic if all Jesus wanted to do in this moment was to show his disciples how humble he was.

But when Jesus commands Peter to let him wash him, he isn't just saying, Peter, you must let me wash your feet so I can show you how humble I am. Because the foot washing is not just teaching us how Christ acts. Jesus is also teaching his disciples about what they need.

So Jesus says, Peter, you need to be washed by me. And you've got to give Peter credit because Peter was always the guy that kind of wanted to go along with what was being said.

And so Jesus responds, he says, if I need to be washed by you, if that's what it takes to be with you, in verse nine, he says, Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head. And obviously, 20 centuries later, we can see clearly Peter's missing the point here. What Peter doesn't need is to be physically washed with his hands in his head.

And that's okay that he says that to Jesus. And Jesus doesn't rebuke him for misunderstanding what's going on here.

[ 10 : 58 ] In fact, Jesus says to Peter that he can't understand right now what's going on. He says, what I am doing, you do not understand, but afterward you will.

So why does Jesus tell Peter that he could not understand what was going on? Like he's unable to understand. And the reason is because the foot washing was a symbol. It was an illustration, a foreshadowing, meant to point forward to something that had not happened yet.

So it would be impossible to understand what was going on because the thing that it was meant to signify had not yet come. Jesus meant for the foot washing as an act of service to be a symbol of an even greater act of service that Jesus would be going to do in the future when he would offer his life on the cross for his disciples.

And you know, in hindsight it was obvious and it must have been so clear. I don't know when John had this eureka moment, but you know, at the foot washing, Jesus lays down his outer garment and assumes the form of a servant in order to wash his disciples' feet.

And then when Jesus goes to the cross, well, yes, he also lays down his outer garment, but he lays down his very life, takes the form of a servant again in order to wash his disciples' souls and to cleanse them from their sins.

[ 12 : 27 ] So the foot washing illustrates the cross and it's only after the resurrection that the disciples could have understood why they needed to see it, why it was so significant.

That Jesus came to this earth to cleanse, to serve and be a cleanser of hearts. And the hope that Christ gives his disciples in this passage is not just that they will be cleansed, even though it definitely is that, that they will be cleansed.

But Jesus also indicates that in being washed there's another hope too. And did you see it? It's that they can be with him. Now, of course, that comes as a rebuke in this passage because Jesus says to Peter, if I do not wash you, you can have no share with me, Peter, which is, that's harsh language.

But Peter must have also understood that with that rebuke came the opposite truth, which is, if I do wash you, then you can have a share with me.

And you know, having been with Jesus so long and seeing how awesome he was and how mighty and loving and gentle and lowly he was, there's nothing that Peter could have wanted more than to be with Jesus.

[ 13 : 46 ] You know, when the writers of the New Testament talk about the hope that we have in Jesus, one of the hopes, it's not just that one day we'll go to heaven, it's that in heaven Jesus is there and that we can be with him.

That's what, that's the hope of Jesus saying, if I don't wash you, you can have no share with me. It's that if I do wash you, you can have a share with me. And that's why Paul in 2 Corinthians 5a says that he would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord.

So Christ tells us that if we can be washed, we can be with Jesus. But you also see in this interaction, this conflict with Jesus and Peter, part of what makes that so hard to accept.

And one of the challenges to really living with that hope that if we are washed, we can be with Jesus. And it's that sometimes we care more about proving our faithfulness to Jesus like Peter does than we care about receiving what he has done for us.

You know, it can be so tempting in life sometimes to hold out our faithfulness to Jesus as if that's the reason why he should accept us and why he should love us and why we should get a chance to

be with him.

[ 14 : 58 ] Rather than having the humility to recognize that our whole life in Christ is not dependent on us, but it's dependent on him and the fact that he's washed us.

And you see this over and over again with Peter because Peter always seemed to be the guy who wanted to prove to Jesus just how faithful he was. I mean, when Jesus is walking on water, who steps out there? It's Peter.

And when Jesus wants to wash the disciples' feet, who's the one that says, far be it from you to wash feet? It's Peter. And in just a few verses from this moment, Peter will look at Jesus in the eye and will say, Jesus, I will lay down my life for you.

As if to say, Jesus, if you get in trouble, you know who's going to be faithful to you? It'll be me. I don't know about these other 11, but I will be there with you till the end. Almost to say, you don't have to worry about anything, Jesus, because I'll never leave your side.

To which Jesus says, will you? He literally says, will you? Jesus says, before the dawn breaks, Peter, he says to Peter, you will betray me.

[ 16 : 15 ] If the measure of Peter's hope for being with Christ was his own faithfulness, then by the end of that very night, he was in trouble with it. And the truth is that our only hope in Christ can only ever be, not our own actions, but the fact that Jesus has come down to us and washed us, if we will receive it.

And the truth is, as foolish as Peter looked that night, sometimes we can be just like him, can't we? We're so tempted in so many small ways, small and subtle ways to say, Jesus, look how faithful I've been.

Can't I have a share with you because of this? There's a pastor in New York City named Tim Keller, Presbyterian minister, and he talks about when he was young, he got into a habit of reading the Bible daily, which was great, and he still does it.

But he said, when he first started reading the Bible as a young Christian, he noticed that he always felt really great after doing the reading. And as he grew in his faith more, he realized that the great feeling that he had after doing his Bible readings was really just the sense of accomplishment, knowing he had been faithful to God.

It was as if he was saying, I've earned my right to be a Christian today. And the point is not that Bible reading is bad, but sometimes we can use things like that to say, look how devoted I've been to you, Jesus.

[ 17 : 40 ] Don't I deserve to be with you? And really all Jesus wants us to know is, have you been washed? I can wash you. And it reminds me of the story Jesus told about the two men who went into the temple, and one was a Pharisee, one was a tax collector, and the Pharisee prays, and this is the prayer that he says.

The Pharisee would have been the well-respected person in society, and he says, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector, and he points to the tax collector.

And the Pharisee says, I fast twice a week, and I give tithes of all I get. And it's as if the Pharisee is looking at God and saying, look how I have served you, or like Peter saying, do you see that I am willing to lay down my life for you?

That's how faithful I am. And what does the tax collector say? He gets on his knees and he says, he beats his chest, and he says, God, be merciful to me as sinner.

And Jesus, when he tells the story, he says, the tax collector is the one who went home justified that day. And so the message of the foot washing is that having a share with God doesn't come through a valiant religious act.

[ 18 : 59 ] It doesn't come through a certain type of service for our king. It comes through the humility of stepping forward and crying out to God and saying to Jesus, what I need is to be washed, and that's the only way that I can be with you.

So the first lesson Jesus teaches his disciples at the foot washing is that they need to be clean. They need to be washed. So the foot washing points forward to the cross. And the second lesson is this, that they were called.

He says the disciples and Christians after them are called to serve like Christ. And if you look at verses 13 and 16, you can see this, that after he had finished washing his disciples feet, Jesus says, you call me teacher and Lord, and you are right for so I am. If then your Lord and teacher has

washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Okay, so just to be clear, Jesus is saying, what John realizes later is that the foot washing symbolizes two things. One of those things is something that only Jesus can do. I mean, Jesus doesn't call us to wash other people's souls.

[ 20 : 27 ] That's something unique about the foot washing that Jesus does. But then Jesus makes another lesson out of it, and he says that what he has done in the foot washing has also been to give us a pattern for the way that we should live in this world.

And if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know that the challenge here is not understanding what it means, perhaps metaphorically, to wash your neighbor's feet.

It's actually doing it. And Jesus actually points to that when he says in verse 17, if you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. Because Jesus knows it's entirely possible to know what it means to wash other people's feet and to understand all of the theology, and to never actually live in the kind of loving and forgiving community that Christ calls us to live inside of.

There was a German pastor named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I'm sure many of you are familiar with him, and he lived up until the 1940s. And one of my favorite stories about him is that he was leading a seminary in Germany.

And there was one day where he was having dinner with all of the other seminary students, and at the end of the meal, he goes into the kitchen to wash all the dishes. And he asks someone to come in, just any student, will you come in here and help me wash the dishes?

[ 21 : 52 ] And no one comes. And so after a few minutes, after no one comes to help, he goes to the kitchen door, he locks it so that no student can come in and help him. And at that point, they're all totally ashamed that no one stood up, and they were banging on the kitchen door to come in and help him wash the dishes.

But he made the point. I mean, the point was obvious, and it didn't need to be spoken. None of them were living with the kind of servant's heart that they were being trained to live with. And the imaginative part of me wants to believe that that very day they had gotten a lesson in foot washing, and that even though they might have understood all of the theology to it, they didn't yet know how to live in light of it.

And it would have been easy to understand. And once the disciples had gotten over the shock of seeing their Lord washing the feet, they would have at least intellectually understood what it meant to wash feet in community with their brothers and sisters.

I mean, it means being willing to serve others, even if it means that we take the form of servants and we make ourselves less. We're willing to stoop to serve others.

And Jesus, as he goes on later in this passage, he's candid to his disciples about just what he expects from them, just what he wants them to be willing to give up for the sake of serving.

[ 23 : 17 ] In verse 34, he says, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. So Jesus says, like if you were here this morning, we talked about this, Jesus says, look at the way that I've loved you.

And that would have, not just in the foot washing, this would have gathered so much more significance after the cross. Look how far I went to love you and love like that when you're with your brothers and sisters in Christ, with no exceptions.

And if it wasn't clear enough, in the very same speech, Jesus says in chapter 15, verses 12 and 14, he says, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. So Jesus is saying, the greatest act of service you can show to another person is to lay down your life for them.

And without any hesitation, Jesus looks at his disciples and says, even if that is what is required of you to love your neighbor, to love your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, you must be willing to do that.

[ 24 : 39 ] But when Jesus tells his disciples to follow his example, he's not primarily telling them just to prepare for some hypothetical imaginary moment, sometime in the future where they may have to give their life of one day.

He's calling them to adopt a way of living right now that lives with that kind of sacrificial love that's defined by service and love for others. And that kind of service doesn't always come in grand gestures, does it?

I mean, in fact, the more quiet and unnoticed and subtle that it is, the more it looks like the foot washing, right?

It's something that was not grand and it was not looked upon well. And we wash each other's feet when we freely give money to someone in need and no one needs to know about it.

You may wash each other's feet by serving in parts of the life of this church and doing the things that, you know, when Thomas steps up and says, we need to volunteer to do this and no one wants to do it, you can wash your fellow believers' feet by doing that thing.

[ 25 : 47 ] It can be bringing meals to someone in need. It may be that God is calling us to serve brothers and sisters in Christ. And the way that we do that is just to forgive them because of resentments that we have, just to show forgiveness.

And it doesn't always have to be within the four walls of this church. I mean, certainly forgiveness shouldn't, right? But you may also wash someone's feet when you see that they're going through a really hard time.

And they're giving you those signals that they're not doing well and you could pass by and not say anything about it and just move the conversation on. And you can stop there and say, how are you doing?

Because isn't it so true that sometimes when we're suffering, what we really want is just someone to take the time to listen to us or just to be with us? So those are all ways that we can serve. And I'm sure, like, I'm sure, or at least I hope that we could gather after this service and you all who have known each other for so long could talk about the ways that each of you has loved each other and served in ways that have been so beautiful and has gone unnoticed.

But if you're also like me, you could probably also think of a lot of times in this church where you, or in this community where you saw a chance to serve. And for whatever reason, you didn't take it and you regret that.

[ 27 : 07 ] And it's easy to turn a sermon like this into a guilt trip where you're not serving hard enough because all of us have failed at the call that Jesus has placed on our life to live like a servant.

And we could make a checklist of things that we could do to make us more servant like and maybe there could be some good to that. But I think that Jesus in this passage offers a better way to motivate us than either a guilt trip or a list of things that we can do that would make us feel better about ourselves.

Because in the end, what Jesus offers here is not guilt and it's not pride, but it's hope through humility. And the hope is this, that in taking the form of a servant, we can become like Christ. Now, if you read this passage carefully, the word hope is not mentioned here. And you might say, well, there is no hope here. This is a command, which is true. But again, if you're a follower of Jesus Christ, I mean, if that's who you are to the core, and if you're in all of Jesus, of who Jesus was and what he did in this life and the way that he loved people around him.

Hearing this call from Jesus to live like Christ isn't just a command. It's also the goal. It's what we want because we found nothing better in this life than the love of Jesus Christ.

[ 28 : 33 ] And so if Jesus tells us to be more like him, our response is, well, of course we want to be more like you, Jesus, because you have given us hope and you have shown us a love that we've never known anywhere else.

And so the question is, how do we get to the point where we love obeying the command to serve? And I think the answer is in the command.

Jesus motivates his disciples by telling them to remember what he has done. He says, I've given you an example that you also should do as I have done to you.

So it's like Jesus is saying, after I'm gone, the way that you motivate yourself to serve like I'm calling you to serve is to remember me and to remember the cross and to remember what I've done for you and to let that fill you with such love that the response of love that I'm commanding you to comes naturally because you're so full of love.

When I was back in the States, when I was in high school, I worked at a restaurant and I was essentially a cleaning boy. But sometimes I would bring drinks to the table and I'm a pretty clumsy person and there was one day where I had just two hands full of drinks and these were big

American sized drinks.

[ 30 : 00 ] And I remember one day I just spilled a full glass of Coke all over this young woman and just went all over her. And I was petrified, I was just embarrassed, you can imagine, and rather than firing me, my boss came up to me afterwards and she said, the trick of carrying drinks is to not look at the drinks but to look where you're going.

And that reminds me of this passage because it's so easy to get caught up in the game of looking at how we're doing, either through only living in shame or living in pride, when what Jesus is calling us to do is to keep our eyes fixed forward and looking at the cross.

And if we can do that, then we find that we begin to keep our balance in our life.

The way that we live the Christian life is by looking at the cross and letting that transform our hearts. And I want to close by just drawing your attention to my favorite verse in this whole passage, which is verse one.

Jesus says this, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. So Jesus loved his disciples. It really has two meanings, that he loved them to the end.

[ 31 : 30 ] He loved them as long as he could, so to the very end of his life, and he loved them with as much as he could. He gave up his whole life for them. And as we look back on the foot washing and as we look back on the cross and what it meant, Jesus is saying, those are our marching orders. Not that we can save the world around us through washing their sins.

We can't do that. Only Jesus can do that. But we can say we are a body of believers committed to loving each other to the end. And that means for as long as we're here and with as much as we have. And that's what Christ wants of us this evening.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you love us and you stooped down to us and you washed our feet and you did things for us that we have not deserved and you've loved us even though we were unlovely.

And we pray that the work that you began on the cross would continue in our hearts and that you would change us through the power of your Holy Spirit. And that day by day as we live this life, we would reflect Christ and the love that he's shown for us more and more.

And we ask all of this in your son's name. Amen. Our closing Psalm this evening is Psalm 23.

[ 33 : 06 ] So let's stand together and worship. Within the past of righteousness

In form his own name say, You know I walk in dance time with, yet will I fear the death Oh, Lord, our faith, we am by law and staffed, we comfort still My table of aspiration in presence of my force I have helped us with all the noise and I come over close Goodness and mercy all I lie shall surely follow me I pray that God's house forevermore, my family place shall be You know these words from Romans chapter 15