

JOHN CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

John 13:1-20 NLT:

¹ *Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.*

² *It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.*

³ *Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God.*

⁴ *So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist,*

⁵ *and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.*

⁶ *When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"*

⁷ *Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will."*

⁸ *"No," Peter protested, "you will never ever wash my feet!" Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me."*

⁹ *Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!"*

¹⁰ *Jesus replied, "A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you."*

¹¹ *For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean."*

¹² *After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing?"*

¹³ *You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am.*

¹⁴ *And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet.*

¹⁵ *I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.*

¹⁶ *I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message.*

¹⁷ *Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.*

¹⁸ *"I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, 'The one who eats my food has turned against me.'*

¹⁹ *I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I Am the Messiah.*

²⁰ *I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me."*

Arnold Billie was a rural mail carrier in southern New Jersey. For twenty-five years his daily route took him sixty-three miles through two counties and five municipalities. Mr. Billie not only delivered mail, he brought personal service. Anything you could get at the post office you could get from Mr. Billie—stamps, money orders, and pickup service. All the customer had to do was leave the flag up on the mailbox. One elderly woman had trouble starting her lawn mower, so when she wanted to use it, she left it by her mailbox and Mr. Billie would start it when he arrived. ¹

Think about it for a moment. If the standard of behavior and motivation of every citizen in the United States was to be like Mr. Billie, we probably could get by with one-tenth of the number of law enforcement officers, one-tenth the number of politicians and patronage workers, one-tenth the amount of taxes, one-tenth the number of lawyers and judges, one-tenth the number of psychologists and psychiatrists, and much less of a driveness to buy things to try and make ourselves happy while at the same time impressing our neighbors, friends, co-workers, family, remote acquaintances, and strangers we pass on the street.

But the ultimate utopia for our nation would be to have as our role model, the one and only **Jesus Christ**. If we all tried to behave according to the example Jesus set for us, we probably would need only a handful of politicians, police, taxes, lawyers, judges, psychologists, and debt collectors. We would not need armies because no one would allow their anger to escalate to the point of conflict. People would not compete with one another to get the best and most because they would give the best and most away. No one would suffer and die from starvation because those that had would share with those that have nothing. There would be no divorce because husbands and wives would live by the teachings of Jesus and submit to one another. We could probably keep listing such potential benefits for several pages but I think by now you get the drift. Several years ago WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) bracelets became popular supposedly as a way to remind people to live like Jesus would live. I must say that I saw a number of the bracelets and T-shirts, but I'm not so sure I actually saw much of the behavior. If people

¹ James Hewett, ed., *Illustrations Unlimited*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Servanthood."

really followed the example of Jesus it would revolutionize behavior today.

“Impossible,” you say. “No way that could ever happen in this world.” Well, it could happen beginning today in this world if people would really behave according to the standards set and lived by Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact we have heard through the Scriptures from both God and Jesus that one day such a world will be a reality, and it will become a reality the day Jesus returns after the Tribulation to set up His Millennial Kingdom.

Now we will take a much closer look at these verses in John 13 and as we do we will hopefully understand how Jesus wanted His disciples to live after He had gone back to Heaven and why He wanted them to live that way.

John 13:1-5 NAS:

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

² During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,

⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

In this culture people walked everywhere they went. They wore sandals and walked over dusty roads, so you can imagine how dusty their feet would be when they arrived at their destination. So it was customary for a host to provide water for his guests' feet to be washed. The one who washed the feet of the guests was usually a slave of the lowest order or, in some cases, the host's wife or children. This sign of hospitality went all the way back to **Abraham** nearly 2,000 years before the birth of Christ. In Genesis 18:3,4 NLT Abraham says:

³ “My lord,” he said, “if it pleases you, stop here for a while.

⁴ Rest in the shade of this tree while water is brought to wash your feet.

We also see a reference to the custom of foot washing in 1 Samuel during the time of David.

1 Samuel 25:40-41 NLT:

⁴⁰ When the messengers arrived at Carmel, they told **Abigail**, “David has sent us to take you back to marry him.”

⁴¹ She bowed low to the ground and responded, “I, your servant, would be

happy to marry David. I would even be willing to become a slave, washing the feet of his servants!"

During Passover week Jesus was on God's precise timetable. He had entered Jerusalem on Sunday, and on Monday He cleansed the Temple by driving out the moneychangers. On Tuesday the Jewish religious leaders attacked Him with a vengeance as they tried every trick in the book to get evidence to arrest Him. If interested you can get more detail about what went on in Matthew 21—25. Although we cannot be certain, it appears likely that Wednesday was probably a day of rest. Thursday was the evening they met for the **Last Supper** during which Jesus performed this act of servitude by washing His disciples' feet. This meal was a normal part of the Passover celebration but it would be the last they shared together and Jesus wanted to drive home the importance of servanthood so that they could carry that message to others after Jesus was gone. He wanted them to understand that it was the fullest expression of love toward others and was an example of the kind of love both He and God had for each and every human being that has lived or ever will live.

Jesus knew that His *hour* had come. We have seen in a number of places in John that Jesus was aware during His ministry that His hour had not yet come. But this was the time God had appointed for Jesus to be crucified for the salvation of all mankind, and Jesus was keenly aware that this was His *hour*. This would be the *hour* when the pain and suffering would be severe and Jesus was keenly aware of that as well. But he was also aware that it would be His hour to be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension back to Heaven.

You know there is a message here for all of us regarding our service to God. I might get some argument on this, but that is okay. I like a good stimulating argument now and then. But I believe that based on John 17:4 we can know that, when the servant of God is in the will of God, he/she is immortal until his/her work on earth is done. The Jewish leaders were unable to arrest Jesus and they were unable to kill Him until the time that God had scheduled for Him to die. We too can be assured that as long as we are submitting to and accomplishing the will of God, He will not let our ministry be cut short until the time He has appointed.

Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray Him. Satan had entered into Judas according to Luke 22:3, and now he would see to it that Judas carried out his betrayal against Jesus. If you remember Jesus' words back in John chapter six you recall that Jesus knew even then that **Judas was an unbeliever** so he had no defense mechanism for fighting off Satan's attacks. Listen to Jesus' words in John 6:64,70–71 NAS:

64 "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.

70 "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" 71 Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

The task of washing another person's feet in first century Palestine was not a status symbol that everyone envied. In fact it would probably be equivalent on the status scale today of a soldier who cleans the latrines. It was a menial task but one that Jesus did not hesitate to take on.

Jesus knew that these twelve apostles each had a desire to be number one and that such competition would be self-defeating in carrying the message Jesus wanted them to carry. In fact, in just a little while they would begin to argue over who among them was the greatest. Listen to what Jesus told them in Luke 22:24-27 NAS:

24 And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

They needed to know the meaning and importance of humility and what better way to teach that than for Him to do something that would teach them what He wanted them to learn.

Warren Wiersbe makes a very profound statement that you might want to give careful consideration: "*The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure.*"² Think about it: "*The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure.*"

John 13:6-11 NAS:

6 So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." 8 Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10 Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." 11 For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

Jesus' example of serving so violates the cultural practices that Peter is outraged by it and claims he will have no part in it. If you are familiar with Christ's ministry, you are probably aware that Peter was not the kind of guy who thought much before he acted and he often had to be corrected by Jesus. It was not uncommon for Peter to spring into action

² Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 13:1.

before he knew what was really going on. This situation proved to be no exception when he told Jesus that he would not let Jesus wash his feet. But then when he found out that by refusing to have Jesus wash his feet, he would lose fellowship with Him, he changed his mind and asked Jesus to bathe him from head to toe. Peter was not yet ready to minister to others because he could not allow Christ to minister to him. We are not to question or try to change any of Jesus' teaching. The word *translated* "wash" in John 13:5–6, 8, 12, and 14 is *nipto* and means "to wash a part of the body." But the word translated "washed" in John 13:10 is *louo* and means "to bathe all over." The distinction is important, for Jesus was trying to teach His disciples the importance of walking righteously with God.³ When a person accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior, they are "bathed all over" and their sins are washed away and forgiven. That truth is clearly stated in the following passage:⁴

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 NAS:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

So we see from Scripture that a person who believes in the work of Christ has all their sins forgiven **forever**, they are washed clean.

But as they go about their business in this world they are going to occasionally stumble into sin because they still live within a human body that is subject to sin. But that person does not need to be completely bathed from sin again. They simply need to have that part of them that has been defiled cleansed.⁵ God promises to cleanse us when we confess our sins to Him (1 John 1:9).

In effect we are getting a foot washing when we take our sins to God, confess them and ask for forgiveness. Because if we are defiled we cannot have daily communion with Jesus. As Jesus said to Peter in John 13:8, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (NAS).⁶

When God "bathes us all over," that is the moment we receive our salvation as we are cleansed of our sin. This is what brings about our *union* with Christ; and that is a permanent relationship that can never change. However, our daily communion with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves "unblemished by the world" (James 1:27). If we

³ Ibid.

⁴ See also Titus 3:3-7; Revelation 1:4-5; and Hebrews 10:12-17.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

permit unconfessed sin in our lives, we hinder our walk with Jesus; and that is when we need to have our feet washed.⁷

That is why in our communion service we always encourage you to confess your sins before you partake of the elements.

God cleanses us through the blood of Christ and through the application of His Word to our lives, as we see in:

1 John 1:5-10 NAS:

*5 This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is Light**, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;*

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

John 15:3 NAS:

3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

The “*water of the Word*” can keep our hearts and minds clean from the contamination that the sin of the world can bring into our lives. But if we do sin, we can take that sin immediately to Christ, confess it, and receive immediate forgiveness.

1 John 2:1–2 NLT:

1 My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous.² He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Now we could ask, why did Jesus go ahead and wash Judas’ feet under these circumstances? We do not know but, whatever His reason, it was of no benefit to Judas because he had never received a complete washing from head to toe. Jesus said that Judas had never been washed of his sins and was an unbeliever. Perhaps Christ was indicating that He offers salvation to everyone, but not everyone receives that salvation and believes in Him to cleanse them from their sins.

It is a wonderful thing to deepen your fellowship with Jesus. The important thing is to be

⁷ Ibid.

honest with Him and with ourselves and keep our feet clean.⁸

John 13:12-17 NAS:

12 So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

The essential lesson in this passage is found in John 13:17: **"If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."**

Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had done, and it appears that He felt they did not because He goes on to explain it to them. He told them that He had given them a lesson in how to serve from a humble perspective. Happiness comes when you live your life within the will of God, and Jesus did not just tell them how to find it, He showed them. By humbling Himself to serve them in a most menial task He was able to demonstrate the kind of holy behavior that pleases God and is rewarded with happiness. According to the world's standards, success and material wealth bring happiness. But true happiness comes when we serve others in the name of Jesus. And that is a promise Jesus makes to us right here in verse 17. People in our day keep seeking happiness by catering to their own desires, acquiring money and possessions, and they stay pretty miserable. You have probably heard the saying, "*He who is all wrapped up in himself is wrapped up in a pretty small package.*" To be so concerned about self all the time is to buy misery. True joy and happiness come from serving the Lord and others.

Would we be presumptuous to make the statement that wealth and success is a breeding ground for unhappiness? My personal experience has led me to believe that without Jesus Christ you have nothing, no matter how much wealth, or good looks, or fame you might have. However Christ may well bless a believer with wealth and power in order to do good things that will bring them happiness. But the bottom line is that you are chasing your tail if you think you can find happiness according to the world's standards. You never are able to grab hold of it and many spend a lifetime of frustration chasing it.

Jesus gave His disciples an example of true Christian ministry.

"*A slave is not greater than his master;*" so, if the master becomes a slave, what does that make the slave? That makes the slave an equal to his master. By His example in becoming a servant, Jesus gave sacrifice and service the respect that it deserves in the Christian life. And just knowing this truth is not enough, we must turn what we know into

⁸ Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Jn 13:6.

action that produces desired results. James 1:22-27 describes this concept as well and is worth reviewing here:

James 1:22-27 NAS:

²² *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

²³ *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;*

²⁴ *for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.*

²⁵ *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*

²⁶ *If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.*

²⁷ *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

We might want to consider a simple formula for happiness in order to help us remember what Christ taught in this passage:

Submission to God + A Clean Life + Service to Others = Happiness

John 13:18-20 NAS:

¹⁸ *"I am not saying these things to all of you; I know the ones I have chosen. But this fulfills the Scripture that says, 'The one who eats my food has turned against me.' ¹⁹ I tell you this beforehand, so that when it happens you will believe that I Am the Messiah.*

²⁰ *I tell you the truth, anyone who welcomes my messenger is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me."*

God predicts the future so that when it comes about people will know that He is the one and only God. The gods of other nations could not do this. And verse 20 tells us that anyone who welcomes a messenger in effect welcomes the one who sent him. If someone accepts us as a messenger for Jesus, we believe that person may be ready to accept the saving message of Jesus, as well as the God who sent Him.

Jesus' coming was an act of love for all mankind and He showed the full extent of His love in three ways:

- 1) His humble service

- 2) His teaching , and
- 3) His death

These three things pretty much sum up Christ's ministry on earth, Philippians 2:5-8 NAS:

⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality
with God a thing to be grasped,
⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made
in the likeness of men.
⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming
obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Some denominations teach that a child receives salvation when they are baptized. That is a misleading and potentially damning doctrine. Any one who believes this could ignore the true message of salvation found in the Bible. When one receives Christ as their Lord and Savior based on His dying on the cross for our sins, we are then baptized and fully cleansed by His blood which is symbolized by a full immersion baptism in water. This represents our being washed clean from head to toe and only requiring an occasional foot washing when we bring our sins to Christ, repent of them, and receive His forgiveness.

How can we best serve Jesus? By following His example and putting into action those things we learn from our Bibles. I would not be surprised if Mr. Billie in our opening story was a Christian doing just that. Let it be our prayer that all Christians everywhere would start conducting themselves in a similar manner. Such a commitment would change the world. May that commitment begin with you and me.