

Loving Is Serving

Bible Background • John 13:1-35

Printed Text • John 13:1-15, 34-35 | Devotional Reading • John 15:18-15:4

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER the significance of Jesus washing the disciples' feet, REPENT of pride that has prevented serving selflessly, and SERVE others as an expression of Christian love.

In Focus

Pastor John Ricks was giving last-minute instructions to the Courtesy Committee. “We are to serve over 100 guests from Blessed Hope Church. They will be coming here from Boston next week to fellowship with us and we want to be sure they are treated kindly,” said the pastor. After the meeting, Joan and her friend Barbara walked to their respective cars. Barbara was the first to speak. “I’m not serving anyone. Every time a church comes here, we are always the ones called on to serve. Isn’t there anyone else in this church who can work?” “Barbara, you shouldn’t be that way. After all, we’re the Courtesy Committee. It’s our job to serve wherever we are needed and help in whatever area we can,” said Joan. “Yeah, but I’m not a servant,” said Barbara. “I didn’t come to this church to work like a slave. I just came to worship the Lord.”

If Jesus didn't mind humbling Himself and being obedient to the Father, shouldn't we have the same attitude? This week we will see how Jesus, the Son of God, decided to show His disciples the mark of a true servant by washing their feet.

Keep in Mind

“I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” (Luke 10:36-37, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Wash (John 13:5) *nipto* (Gk.) — To cleanse the hands, feet or face, especially to perform ceremonial cleansing.

B. Clean (v. 10) *katharos* (Gk.) — Free from pollution or dirt; spiritually pure or clear.

Say It Correctly

Iscariot. iss-CARE-ee-ott.

KJV

John 13:1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.
2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;
3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;
4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.
5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.
6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?
7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I

do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

NLT

John 13:1 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."

34 "So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

The People, Places, and Times

Foot Washing. Wearing open sandals on dusty roads made it necessary to wash one's feet frequently; therefore a host would customarily provide water for his guests upon their arrival, so that they might wash their feet (see Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judges 19:21). Sometimes a servant performed this service for the guests (1 Samuel 25:41). It was considered the most menial task a servant could perform (see Mark 1:7). Not washing one's own feet, on the other hand, was a sign of deep mourning (2 Samuel 19:24). As recorded in John's Gospel the act of foot washing has a two-fold significance. First, it is a symbolic prophecy of Jesus' atoning death,

which would cleanse from sin and make it possible for His disciples to inherit eternal life with Him. Second, it is a lesson in humility. Some have also seen the foot-washing as alluding to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

John's Gospel. John's Gospel differs from the other writers' and puts a unique emphasis on particular events. It is more philosophical than the other accounts and was likely written last of the four. John is the only Gospel that outlines certain events in the Upper Room, such as the foot-washing and the identifying of Judas as the betrayer by the dipping of the bread. Matthew, Luke, and Mark all mention Jesus instituting the Last Supper. John does not. John underscores Jesus' teaching concerning these events and their meaning, rather than just reporting the facts of the occasion.

Background

With the beginning of John 13, Jesus' public ministry has ended and He is alone with the Twelve. Of the Gospel writers, only John provides us with this intimate view of Jesus' private teaching and prayer during His last days before death (John 13–17). John 13 records the events of the night before the Crucifixion—the eating of the Passover and the institution of the Lord's Supper (cf. Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-38). Luke's Gospel account informs us that sometime early during the Passover meal, an argument broke out among the disciples concerning who would obtain the highest rank in the coming kingdom. Jesus rebuked their self-centered arrogance. "In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called 'friends of the people.' But among you, it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant" (Luke 22:25–26, NLT). Then He washed their feet, which visually demonstrated humble servanthood. The Gospel of John does not record this heated discussion between the disciples or Jesus' rebuke, but John does record for us the powerful, dramatic response on behalf of the Master Teacher. He demonstrated the meaning of true humility by washing the disciples' feet.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Displays Servanthood (John 13:1-5)
2. Jesus Defines Servanthood (vv. 6-11)
3. Jesus Explains Servanthood (vv. 12-15, 34-35)

In Depth

1. Jesus Displays Servanthood (John 13:1-5)

Jesus and the disciples were ready to celebrate the Passover. Ordinarily, the lowest servant on the staff washed the feet of the guests before the meal. In those times, the roads were dirty, and the people wore sandals. The tables were low, about the height of today's coffee tables. Dinner guests reclined on pillows at the table. Therefore, clean feet were essential to the enjoyment of the meal. However, this meal with Jesus and His disciples was private with no servant to do the washing. This is the backdrop to why Jesus took off His robe, placed Himself in the position of a lowly servant, and one by one washed the dirty feet of each disciple. John interjected into his account of this moving Upper Room experience an interesting fact. The devil had already taken over the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. Jesus served not only the faithful disciples, but Jesus also served His enemy. Judas' feet were washed along with all the rest.

What "things" did the Father give to Jesus' hands?

2. Jesus Defines Servanthood (vv. 6-11)

Jesus' actions puzzled the disciples, yet only Peter said anything. Peter didn't understand Jesus' apparent role reversal and told Jesus that he would never allow Him, the Master, to do the menial job of washing feet. Jesus responded to Peter's emphatic statement with one of His own: "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (from v. 8). Symbolically, the word "wash" alluded to washing away one's sins. Apart from this type of cleansing, one cannot have any part of Jesus Christ. The idea of Jesus as a servant was a new concept to the disciples. Like Peter, we must learn not to try to dictate the terms by which Jesus will move in our lives. Jesus knew but refused to reveal the identity of the one who was not "clean" (vv. 10-11). He wanted Judas Iscariot to know that He knew Judas' plan to betray him and that he was not going to hinder him, though his actions were evil.

How do you explain Peter's not wanting Jesus to wash his feet?

3. Jesus Explains Servanthood (vv. 12-15, 34-35)

After His act of humility, Jesus asks the disciples if they know what He has done (v. 12). Jesus explains that He is certainly their honored Master, yet He has taken the place of a servant and washed their feet. He is not so above them that He cannot show them an example of humility. The Old Testament demanded that one not only love God but one's neighbor as oneself. Thus, the command to love is old. However, Christ not only commanded His disciples to love, but also to do "as I have loved you" (v. 34). The latter part is new. The kind of love He had is everlasting (v. 1), humbling (v. 5), and willing to die a sacrificial death for undeserving sinners. Love acts. Christ demanded this kind of love from the disciples as a sign to all people that they were His disciples. Their love for each other would not only be a sign of identification with Him, but the exercise of that love would enable them to survive in a hostile world.

Is the command to "Love one another" a new commandment?

Search the Scriptures

1. Where was Jesus eventually going? (John 13:1, 3)
2. What meal was taking place in this passage (v.1)
3. Describe the process of Jesus preparing to wash their feet (vv. 4-5)
4. How will "outsiders" react when they see that kind of love? (vv. 34-35)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why is it so important that we serve others? Is it more important for us to allow others to serve or that we serve? Explain.
2. What was Jesus attempting to convey to His disciples and why?

Liberating Lesson

Our society emphasizes the importance of getting ahead, heaping praise and attention on those with the most power. What would happen if those with power and privilege followed Christ's example of humility? How would the "foot washing" principle of humble, loving service be enacted: a) between employers and employees in a Christian business? b) between the pastor and deacons, trustees or stewards? c) between the tenants and the building superintendent or owner? d) between the president and his Cabinet members? Take steps this week to demonstrate humility in the relationships you have with others.

Application for Activation

Think of ways you can be a servant to those in your church who may not feel comfortable being served. Find at least one person in your church or at your workplace who is not as blessed as you are. Do something for that person that expresses your love by an act of humble service. Whatever it is, give of yourself that someone may be blessed.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

John 13:1-15, 34-35

The events recorded in chapters 13 through 17 relate to the last day before the Passover. Jesus is with His disciples, and He is about to teach them in practical terms some of the most important doctrines. Here Jesus gives them some final instructions before His departure from this world. The picture is like that of a father, or the head of a family, about to take a long trip from home. Because He is going to be away for a long time, Jesus gathers His disciples to give them instruction on how to live with one another until He returns. Jesus encourages and instructs them regarding how to live as children of God in a world full of evil. He talks to them about serving one another and living in love and harmony. Love is the trademark of all believers. Through love for one another, the world will know that we are His disciples. Through love, the world will recognize that He is truly from the Father. Through love, we show that we love Him. We keep His commandment when we love one another, for love to Him is the greatest commandment.

1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

John gives a summary statement of the spiritual importance of the events that are about to follow (vv. 1-3). Note Jesus' deep awareness of the dawning of the "hour" (time) for the fulfillment of His mission—that is, His death—His consistent love for His people, and the work of the devil, which results in His betrayal. This summary includes Jesus' awareness of the divine origin and destiny of His work. John starts his narrative by telling us the time period of the events—the eve of the Feast of the Passover. Jesus is aware "that his time has come." John uses this phrase six other times in his Gospel (John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 17:1). The first five instances are in the negative while this verse and 17:1 are in the positive sense. The significance of the statement is notable. It tells of the divine nature of Christ. Although He walked on earth as a human, He maintained His divine nature. He was totally aware of all things, including the purpose of His coming to earth, and precisely the time for His departure. This separates Him from ordinary humans. John introduces here the subject of love, which will play an important role in the narrative. Love, as noted above, is the hallmark of all things that Jesus did. The phrase "having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" shows Christ's readiness to give up Himself on behalf of His people. The phrase "The devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (v. 2) qualifies the arrival of the time for His departure. It is one of the signs of the time.

3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

Verse 3 also explains the fact of Christ's divinity. "Jesus knowing" (Gk. eido, AY-doh) refers to His being "aware, having the knowledge, or being conscious" that the Father had given all things into His hands. John says that Jesus is conscious of the authority He has from the Father. It seems that His knowledge both of the coming moment of His departure and His divine authority and glory were basic to this teaching. The foot-washing was also triggered by the disciples' argument about who would be "the greatest" among them (Luke 22:24). Before this time, Jesus had rebuked this type of spirit or given other examples. In Matthew 18:1-10, He set a little child in their midst saying that they had to become as little children in humility and not seek to lord over one another. He rebuked this spirit on other occasions as well (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). It seems, however, that they have not yet learned their lesson on this subject. With the time for His departure drawing near, He seeks to teach further about this worldly passion. He uses a visual aid to teach the same truth.

4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

The feast is over and, as people often do, the disciples sit talking at the table. They are so absorbed in their conversation that apparently no one notices what Jesus is doing. While everyone is selfishly debating their positions in the kingdom, Jesus gets up, takes off His outer robe, ties a towel around Himself, and pours water into a basin and starts to wash their feet. Interestingly we know that this is Jesus' final meal before he goes to the Cross, yet He is not absorbed in His own thoughts as they are. He sees a need to demonstrate an important lesson and moves to prepare the items He needs. Apart from the real teaching of this event of humility and servitude (v. 12 ff), Jesus is following the Jewish custom. It is customary for a host to wash the feet of his guests as a symbol of affection and reverence. Supplicants who are making important requests also practiced it. However, to Greeks and Romans, the washing of feet was the duty of the lowest slave. It is in this context of servitude that Jesus presents this teaching. He takes off His own garment and girds Himself with the towel, the same towel he would use to dry their feet. He fetches the water, fills the basin and goes from man to man, washing their feet.

6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 8 Peter said unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

Peter understands the lowliness of this act so well that when it is his turn, he refuses to have the Lord wash him. The question here, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?," is rhetorical. Notice the word "Lord" (Gk. kurios, KOO-reeoss) that Peter uses in verse 6. This is translated "owner" or "master," and means one with full authority. It is also used as a title of honor or respect. It is the opposite of servanthood. Peter's use of this word signifies how highly he regards the Lord, and how lowly he sees himself. Peter emphasizes that he is not worthy for the Lord to wash him. Peter, ignorant of the spiritual and moral implications of this act, refuses to be washed by Jesus. Jesus makes it clear to Peter that there is a motive behind what He is doing and promises to explain it shortly to him. Still, Peter stubbornly refuses to yield to the washing and emphatically says to Jesus "Thou shalt never wash my feet." The word "wash" (Gk. nipto, NIP-toh), which means to cleanse, is used about seven times to describe the act of washing part of the body (see Matthew 6:17; 15:2; John 9:7-15). Peter's understanding of this act is only physical. But he later learns that something more than mere washing of feet is involved here. There is also a spiritual dimension. Jesus' reply to him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," brings out this dimension. The word "part" (Gk. meros, MEHR-oss) can also mean "share, portion, piece, or allotment." Some suggestions include that Peter's refusal would mean that he would not share or participate in the work of Christ. The washing of feet, therefore, is more than an example. It is characteristic of the way the disciples could participate in His humiliation and suffering.

9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. 10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

After Jesus' explanation, Peter goes to the other extreme, asking Christ to clean more of him. Once again, Jesus patiently replies, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet." Just as in the natural life, a man who has bathed needs only to wash the dust off his sandaled feet when he returns home, so in the spiritual life a person who has been cleansed from his or her sins through faith in Christ need only confess those sins to be entirely clean again (1 John 1:9). Jesus takes this opportunity as He talked about cleanliness to point out that not everyone in the room is clean. He is referring to Judas Iscariot. Jesus wants Judas to know that He is fully aware of Judas' intentions and that this act will mark him as unclean. Here, just hours before the betrayal, was an opportunity for Judas to repent. But there was no confession or repentance on the part of Judas.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

After washing their feet, Jesus proceeds to teach the application of this service and the implications of His action. He asks them whether they understand what He has done. Of course, the answer is no. He knows how limited their understanding is. His intention is to get their attention and to make them think. To answer His own question, Jesus appeals to His relationship with them and reminds them of that Lord and servant relationship. They call Him their Master and Lord. The word translated here as "Master" is the Greek word *didaskalos* (*did-AHS-kahl-oss*), meaning "one who teaches." The word translated "Lord" is the Greek word *kurios* (*KOO-ree-oss*), which is sometimes translated "Master." Jesus uses His double title of Teacher and Lord to strike an important note, which He would explain later. The disciples by inference know what it means to be a teacher or lord. It does not include the washing of feet. That is the puzzling thing about the whole event. To the ordinary Jew, Greek, or Roman, it does not make any sense for a teacher to stoop down and wash his servants' feet. With this understanding, Jesus now goes on to make His point, which is the climax of the narrative—how to serve one another as disciples and, yes, as Christians. The message is clear. He says, "If I, being your Master and Lord, would condescend to do this, you should be willing to do the lowest service for one another." This act is revolutionary since humility was despised in the ancient world as a sign of weakness. Before the Bible, the idea of humility was completely tied up with the idea of humiliation. In that highly stratified society, you always knew who was above your station and who was below. Being "humble" and voluntarily placing yourself in a station below your rightful place was unheard of. Jesus made humility a virtue when it was not before. Jesus calls on His followers "to wash one another's feet." This is specific in the context of Jesus' act, but the principle is clear. They are to serve one another. He tells them that He has set an example for them to follow and calls on them to imitate Him.

13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13 through 17 constitutes the last discourse of Jesus with His disciples on the eve before His passion. There He taught them the greatest and most important doctrine, as one who is going away for good (v. 33). For Jesus, love is the central theme that ties all teachings and the foundation on which Christianity is built. Emphasizing the importance of love, Jesus says that He is giving a new commandment and that is to "love one another." "New," *kainos* (Gk. *KIE-noce*), means renewed or fresh. Jesus has the idea of renewing the old commandment and refreshing the disciples' memory of readings from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18) or on the other hand, of giving them a fresh commandment. It seems that Jesus is doing both: giving them a new perspective on the old theme of love. The new perspective is to love one another in the way that He loves them. Jesus calls His disciples to follow His example of love, i.e., to be ready even to lay down their lives for one another and for others (Compare John 15:12-14, Romans 5:8-11; Luke 6:27-31). To Jesus, love is the emblem or flag by which Christians are to be identified. Jesus says that people will be able to recognize that we are His

disciples if we have love for one another. Love, Jesus says, is the trademark of all Christians (1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-21) and this love should not be restricted to our fellow Christians and families, but extended to our neighbors, i.e., whoever we meet, as we have discussed.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Laban Arranges to Wash Servant's Feet
(Genesis 24:24-33)

TUESDAY

Brothers Provided Water to Wash Feet
(Genesis 43:20-25)

WEDNESDAY

Servants and Masters, but Same Lord
(Ephesians 4:6-9)

THURSDAY

Peter Denies Jesus Three Times
(John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27)

FRIDAY

Jesus Betrayed by a Trusted Disciple
(Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30)

SATURDAY

Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet with Perfume
(John 12:1-7)

SUNDAY

Jesus Loved Disciples; Washed Their Feet
(John 13:1-15, 34-35)