

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

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We are on the final stretch of the The Gospels Series, and we are focusing on the Passion Week, the final days of Jesus' life on earth. **Today, we are talking about the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet in John 13.**

The story takes place in Jerusalem in the year 33AD, almost 2,000 years ago, during the annual Passover Festival. It was Thursday evening, the day before Jesus was crucified. Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover meal together, in the private upper room of a guest home. This was a relatively quiet moment compared to the previous days where Jesus had made his triumphant entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey, turned over the tables in the Temple and silenced the religious leaders.

Let's read the story.

"1Before 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. 2It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God." John 13:1-3 NLT

Jesus knew what was about to happen. He knew that "his hour was at hand" and "the devil had already prompted Judas to betray him." He knew he was about to be betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. This wasn't a surprise to Jesus. All of these things were under God's control, and part of his sovereign plan to save humanity.

Jesus also knew who He was. He knew "that he had come from God, had been given authority over everything and would soon return to God." Think about that! Jesus was fully aware that he was the Son of God, and he chose to humble himself. Paul said it this way, "Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead he gave up his divine privileges, humbling himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross," Philippians 2:6-8 NLT. Jesus is the ultimate picture of humility!

4So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, 5and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. 6When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7Jesus 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." 9Simon Peter exclaimed, "Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!" 10Jesus 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." 11For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, "Not all of you are clean." John 13:4-11 NLT

Take a moment to imagine Jesus and his disciples sitting around the table, about to share a meal. Then all of a sudden, Jesus stood up, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into

a bowl, then washed each of the disciples' dirty feet. This must have been incredibly humbling for the disciples to watch their teacher, who they think might be the Messiah, wash each of their feet, without saying a word.

Peter broke the awkward silence when Jesus came to him by saying, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?...No, you will never ever wash my feet!" I think Peter was embarrassed because he realized that Jesus was doing a servant's job; a job that none of the disciples were willing to do.

Jesus went on to tell Peter that, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to me." **Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them that he would make them spiritually clean by washing away their sins through his death on the cross.** And this was something that they could not do for themselves.

Peter overreacted again by asking Jesus to wash his whole body. Jesus assured Peter that washing his whole body wasn't necessary, just his feet, because he had already taken a bath. I think Jesus was speaking to the physical and spiritual reality of foot washing. To the physical reality he was saying, "you need to wash your feet before dinner because you've been walking in the dust." And to the spiritual reality he was making the point that although their sins had been washed away, they will still need to cleanse themselves from sin on a daily basis. Jesus taught this in his prayer, "Forgive us for our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," Matthew 6.

Then Jesus said something interesting, "You disciples are clean, but not all of you." What did he mean? Jesus was talking about Judas. Jesus had washed Judas' feet, but he was letting Judas and the other disciples know that Judas still wasn't clean. Jesus was calling Judas out because he knew Judas was about to betray him. After Jesus served Judas bread, He said, "hurry up and do what you are going to do." So Judas left the room.

12After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? 13You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because that's what I am. 14And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. 15I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. 16I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. 17Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them...34So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Jesus asked his disciples if they understood why he had washed their feet. He probably assumed that they didn't get the picture, because he went on to explain. We already know one reason Jesus washed the disciples' feet was to illustrate that he would make his disciples spiritually clean by washing their sin away through his physical death on the cross. Here he told them **the second reason he washed their feet was "to give an example to follow."** Jesus was their Teacher and Lord, yet he humbled himself to serve them in love. This is even more amazing knowing what we know on this side of history. Jesus was the Son of God, yet he humbled himself to the point of death for the sake of those he loves.

Jesus summarized his foot washing illustration by giving his disciples a simple command, "Love each other, just as I have loved you." The word Jesus used for love is the Greek word agape. **Agape love is a decision to do what is best for another person (Ken Boa).** It's a decision of your will, not of your

emotions, which means you don't have to feel it to do it. Agape love is unconditional, your decision to love isn't a response to how you are treated, it's a response to how Jesus has treated you. John said, "We love because He first loved us." 1John 4:19 ESV. This means you can love people who are difficult to love, even your enemies.

But to be clear, this doesn't mean you should stay in a harmful relationship, sometimes it's best to love someone from a distance. Agape love is a decision to do what is best for another person, not what is best for you. Paul said, "Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too," Philippians 2:3-4 NLT. This means you don't love someone to get something from them, you love them for their benefit alone, and this usually comes with a cost. This kind of love cost Jesus his life.

Jesus told his disciples, "Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them." **Jesus didn't say God will bless you for knowing and talking about love. He said God will bless you for loving others.** I think the blessing might be experiencing God's presence in a special way, or the natural benefits that happen when you love someone well. Remember, your motivation isn't to get something from someone, but many times people love back in response to being loved. It's like when you smile at someone, and they smile back.

Jesus also said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." **Love is the greatest way to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world.** Unfortunately, the church hasn't always had the best reputation in the world. But it's never too late to change that. If you want to let the world know about Jesus, the best way is to love one another, beginning with those closest to you. If you want the world to know about Jesus, serve your spouse or your roommates, be patient with your kids, be kind to your coworkers, be generous with your neighbors and show respect to difficult people.

The command to love one another sounds simple enough, but in reality it's not that easy to live out in daily life. Loving others may look beautiful on Instagram with people smiling and enjoying a good meal together, but we all know in real life community is messy. Your spouse gets on your nerves sometimes, your kids wear out your patience, your roommate doesn't always do their part, your coworkers can be hard to deal with. This is all the more reason why you must make the decision to love, not in response to how you are treated, but in response to Jesus' love for you. And the truth is, you will struggle to do this, and sometimes flat out fail.

But there is good news for you! **On the other side of struggle and failure is God's grace.** When you fail to love others, God always gives you a way to make the situation right. And that way is admitting your fault and asking forgiveness from the person you failed to love. Listen, God knew it would be hard for his children to love one another unconditionally. This is why He said, "Make allowance for each other's faults—bear with one another, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others," Colossians 3:13 NLT.

God doesn't expect perfection, He expects participation in the way of Jesus. I believe we grow in grace through the process of practicing, struggling, failing, confessing, forgiving and then repeating the process over and over again. Paul agrees, "we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him." 2Corinthians 3:18 The Message.

Prayer – Thank you Father for sending your Son Jesus Christ into the world, to bring us the good news of your love, forgiveness and your kingdom come. We are eternally lost without you. Help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to love others, even when it's hard to love. Give us grace we need when we fail to love people well. Lord come quickly. Amen.