

## John 13:1-17

### *Jesus Washes Feet*

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Chapters 13 through 17 contain the final discourses of the Lord with His disciples just before His crucifixion and conclude with His great high-priestly prayer on their behalf. In these passages, the disciples hear the voice of Jesus leading them into a greater understanding of His new place before the Father and consequently also of His new position in the world.

These chapters can be compared to love letters from the Lord. The great and faithful Bridegroom of the church—Jesus—speaks to His disciples and assures them of His special and enduring love for them.

**It is now the day before the crucifixion. The setting is the Upper Room, prepared for the Last Supper. The evening meal is the Passover meal.**

**Jesus gets up from the meal, takes a towel, and wraps it around His waist and washes the disciples' feet. What do we know about the act of foot washing in Jesus' day? Why was it done?** Everyone walked in sandals in a dusty environment. Washing feet was a practical and cultural thing—a sign of hospitality. It was expected that the guests' feet would be washed. There is no spiritual significance attached.

**Who normally washes the guests' feet?** Washing feet in such a situation is the role of the most menial of servants. Normally, the host would *not* do this washing himself, because it is regarded as a very demeaning task.

**By washing their feet, what messages does Jesus send to His disciples?** It was a powerful visual lesson in servant leadership. It is a way that Jesus could demonstrate His unfathomable love for His disciples. But beyond this, it's a lesson which the disciples desperately need to learn, a lesson in humility. In the kingdom of God, a position of leadership is simply a place of service.

**Note:** Reflect on verse 3 and consider Jesus' thought process before washing the disciples' feet. Remember as you move up the ranks that no matter where you find yourself on the leader-follower scale, *the Christian is to serve God by serving others*. Leadership is simply one place of service. It enables one to serve as others cannot. Rank and privilege are not occasions for arrogance but are opportunities for service.

**Application:** What does servant leadership look like in our lives? What are some examples of specific things we can do to serve others in Jesus' name?

**In verse 6, Peter's comment might be better phrased, "You're not going to wash my feet are you?"** Peter is arrogant enough to think *he* knows better than Jesus about what is appropriate and what is not. He knows that Jesus is deliberately washing the feet of every disciple, and yet Peter is so bold as to correct Jesus, as though He was wrong. Peter wants to do things his way—the way he thinks is best. Today people often want to come to God their way, according to their terms.

We all can identify with Peter when he speaks before he thinks. But whatever Peter's faults, he deeply loves the Savior. If you look beyond his impulsiveness, you can see his total devotion. Jesus knows Peter's heart. Peter ends up as a member of the inner circle of three. The bottom line is that Jesus wants your heart and can work with your unique personality and imperfect performance.

Jesus was speaking of spiritual cleansing, as verses 7-9 clarify. Peter understood Him to be speaking on the physical level.

**Application:** How would you characterize Peter's response when Jesus approaches him to wash his feet? "I don't deserve to have my feet washed by you." That's exactly the point! None of us would ever deserve to have Jesus serve us. But think about the many ways that Jesus has served you throughout your life.

**Why does Jesus wash Judas' feet knowing he would betray Him?** It is an offer of initial spiritual cleansing for Judas. It's not too late to repent. Jesus' solemn announcement now forces Judas to act quickly or to repent. At this point Judas has a choice to make. It is not too late.

**Application:** Does God expect us to conduct foot washing services today?

- In verse 14 Jesus says, "you also should wash one another's feet."
- In verse 15 He says, "do as I have done for you" not *what* I have done.
- Jesus is clearly teaching the principle of servanthood/servant leadership, rather than merely commanding the practice of foot washing. The washing of the disciples' feet is an example to be followed—not just an act to imitate as a ritual.

**Note:** It is amazing how much Jesus loves these men knowing that they have been arguing (or will shortly do so) about who is the greatest and which one will sit at His right hand. He knows that they are about to forsake Him and flee for their lives. He knows that Peter will deny Him, Judas will betray Him, and Thomas will doubt Him.

It is one thing for people to love us, who do not know all of our wicked deeds, thoughts, and motivations. It is another for the Holy God of heaven to love us, knowing every wicked thing we have done and will do. This is, indeed, amazing love. He loves us because it is His nature. It is impossible for Him to not love us. What a comfort to the Christian, knowing that our Lord's love is constant and unchanging, knowing that He chose to love us—and to keep on loving us—purely out of His grace, and not based upon our performance but on the basis of who He is. What security! What grace! What a Savior!

**What is the active verb in verses 15 & 17? Do**

**What's the message in these verses?** The important thing is not *knowing* the truth, but *doing* it. If Jesus' disciples do what He has commanded, they will be blessed. God expects us to be active not passive. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

**Do we get more joy and satisfaction from knowing or doing?** We are not blessed so much by what we know as we are blessed by acting on what we know. We get great joy from exercising our faith. That's the way God made us.

**Where do works fit into the Christian's relationship with God?** Doing things/works are important to God. Works are evidence of a true faith. *We* cannot do good works (in God's eyes) unless we are first "in Christ."

"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

**What is the proper motivation for doing good works?** Appreciation, love, and a desire to please God. Not to earn God's favor. We already have that. Trust and obedience are inseparable.

**What point is Jesus making in verse 16?** His point is that no disciple of His should think it beneath him or her to serve others since He, the master and sender, had humbled Himself to serve. By common consent, slaves occupy an inferior role to that of their masters, and messengers (Gr. *apostolos*) do the same to those who send them. Jesus was contrasting roles, not essential worth.

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**MEMORIZE: John 13:16**