

Sunday, August 30, 2020

This will be the second in a series of sermons on John 13-17, commonly known as “The Farewell Discourse.” The outline that I’m following is:

1. [Jesus loves His own \(13:1\)](#) [7/5/2020]
2. **Foot washing (13:2-17)**
3. Identifying the Traitor (13:18-30)
4. Christ’s Glory and how we are to live in His temporary absence (13:31-38)
5. Preparing a Place (14:1-4)
6. The only way to the Father (14:5-7)
7. Seeing God (14:8-14)
8. Peace and Comfort (14:15-27)
9. Loving God (14:28-31)
10. Abiding in Christ, the True Vine (15:1-11)
11. Friends of Christ (15:12-17)
12. The hatred of the world (15:18- 16:4a)
13. The work of the Holy Spirit (16:4b-15)
14. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy (16:16-24)
15. Prayer in His name (16:25-32)
16. He’s spoken that you might have peace (16:33)
The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)
17. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5)
18. Jesus prays for His present people (17:6-19)
19. Jesus prays for His future people (17:20-26)

Today, Lord willing, I plan to go over the washing of the disciples’ feet by Jesus. There is so much wonderful instruction here for us...if you pay attention and gain some new understanding, you might just go out of here with a change in your heart. Here is the text:

“And supper being ended, the devil having now put 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 was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 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. Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also [my] hands and [my] head. 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. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. 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? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for [so] I am. If I then, [your] Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:2-17)

I’d like to go over four things here:

1. The context of the foot washing.
2. Who performed the foot washing.
3. Who received the foot washing.
4. The significance of the foot washing.

The context of the foot washing

The foot washing episode takes place against two competing backdrops – a very dark one, and a very glorious one. The dark one is that Satan is on the scene, acting through the person of Judas Iscariot. Remember, this comes right after verse 1, with that wonderful language of Jesus loving His own unto the end. And we're immediately hit with "the devil having now (or, already) put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him." Satan is able, in some mysterious way, to put things into our hearts, and by the time these guys came into the upper room, he had already entered Judas.

"And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude." (Luke 22:2-6)

Now, the text doesn't mean that Judas was a great guy up to this point and the devil changed him. Judas had been chewing around on his discontentment and greed for some time, and Satan used that as an opportunity to enter his heart. Wherever and however God is loving His own, the devil is right there to try to put a stop to it, adding distress, contention, confusion, etc. We know he was also busy in the upper room stirring up strife and going after Peter specifically:

"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest...And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired [to have] you, that he may sift [you] as wheat: But I have prayed for thee [Note: He didn't pray for Judas], that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:24, 31-32)

This strife and contention among the apostles as to who would be the greatest was a long-standing thing (see, Mark 9:34; Luke 9:46), and it had found its way into this room, just hours before Christ's crucifixion. Yes, Satan had slithered in and was working his devices. But there's a glorious backdrop too. Christ's redemptive work is almost done, He's loving His own, and He's not going to lose one of His true sheep. He is getting ready to go back to His Father. The

Father had given all things into His hands (including the actions of Judas – all of that was part of His plan), He had come from God, and He was going back to Him. Against those backdrops (Satan’s work, and His return to glory), with all the things He could have said and done here, He washes their feet! He teaches them about servanthood! It must be pretty important; it was, after all, a common theme throughout His earthly ministry. It’s time to teach them again about humility. Matthew Henry: *“If the wolf has seized one of the flock, it is time for the shepherd to look well to the rest.”*

The immediate time that this took place, according to the text, is “supper being ended.” And the question is, what supper? The Passover supper? The Lord’s Supper? Some other supper that happened before those two? I believe John is intentionally vague about it, because it doesn’t matter to the point of the story. The other question is, if supper is already over, how can Jesus be said to “rise from supper” in v. 4, and why are they still eating in v. 26? Well, this can also be translated as “during supper,” or interpreted “after supper was done being prepared.” The general picture is that supper is ready, they have arranged themselves at the table to eat, Jesus rises to wash their feet, returns to His position, and they continue eating.

The broader historical context of this incident is fascinating. Foot washing was a common practice at that time. It was a servant’s job – a menial task, that required little to no special skill. People at the time would bathe their bodies (either in a public bathing pool, or at home if they were wealthy enough), and then go out and walk in sandals on dusty, dirty roads, which would cause their feet to become soiled. So, it was customary for servants to wash peoples’ feet, for the sake of cleanliness and comfort.

In this story, the basin, the water and the towel appear to already be there in the room. Why the goodman of the house hadn’t arranged for one of his servants to wash their feet, I do not know. But I do know this: Jesus rose from dinner and took care of it. The impression I get is that everyone in that room knew that the foot washing needed to be done, and not one of them took the initiative to do it – they were too busy trying to figure out who among them would be the greatest. Jesus may have waited to do it in order to give them a chance to do it, which would have driven the message home to them even more strongly. But He did do it, and rising from supper to do it sends the message that “I need to teach these guys a lesson without any further delay.” It’s the idea of teaching them “betimes.”

Who performed the foot washing

Of course, Jesus Christ is the one performing the foot washing. He is God Incarnate. When we talk about the “Incarnation,” we’re talking about the eternal Son of God, the second person in the Trinity (Matthew 28:19), “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting”

(Micah 5:2), being made flesh and dwelling among us (John 1:14). This is who stooped down, got on His knees, and washed their feet. He took on the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7). He is truly God and truly man. And here He is doing the menial work of the lowest servant. When I think of the incarnation of the eternal Word, and of Him being a servant, I think of the following passage from Philippians 2:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth; And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:5-11)

Here we have Jesus being identified as the epitome of humility; the example that we should all be following. By His example, He has assigned honor and dignity to the act of humbling oneself. For those of you who harbor pride in your heart, look at what Jesus did here. He was in the form of God – His very essence is divine. He thought it not robbery to be equal with God – because He is God, He didn’t somehow achieve that status through rapine and plunder; He didn’t take it by force; He didn’t acquire it by some unjust act. Rather, He’s always been equal with God. And He willingly made Himself of no reputation – the words here mean that He emptied Himself. Emptied Himself of what? I believe it at least means that in some way, He emptied Himself of the honor, dignity and glory that is due to Him as God. He temporarily laid it aside or veiled it, as it were, and took upon Him the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. He became a servant. He became a man. And He humbled Himself, being obedient in all ways, up to and including His death on the cross. That humiliating, painful, cursed manner of death. And because of all that, God has highly exalted Him. Some have pointed out that this foot washing scene is emblematic of His incarnation and ascension – He lays aside His garments, puts on the servant’s towel, does the servant’s work, takes His garments back again, and returns to where He came from. Beloved, do not forget who it is that is washing the disciples’ feet.

Who received the foot washing

Here John refers to them simply as the “disciples.” Lest there be any confusion, Luke identifies them as the twelve apostles in Luke 22:14. So in this room on this night, we have Jesus and His original twelve apostles. Luke tells us that He chose the twelve from among all His disciples after a night of prayer:

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called [unto him] his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.” (Luke 6:12-13)

The twelve are:

- **Simon Peter** – aka Cephas. Andrew’s brother. Fisherman. He grew up in Bethsaida, and later lived in a house in Capernaum with his brother, wife and mother-in-law. Throughout the Gospels, he is outspoken, brash, impetuous, arrogant, often speaking and acting without thinking first, etc.. But He was a man that loved Christ and couldn’t bear to be without Him. On this night of the Lord’s Supper, Peter calls Christ into question on washing his feet, proudly says he would never deny Him, falls asleep during Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane, cuts off Malchus’s ear, and abandons and then denies Jesus. However, he turned out to be one of the most humble, powerful preachers the world has ever known, as we see in Acts and in the two epistles that bear his name.
- **Andrew** – Peter’s brother. Fisherman. He and John started as disciples of John the Baptist and were the first of the twelve to follow Jesus. His first action was to tell Peter and bring him to Christ (John 1:40-42). He’s the one who found the boy with the five barley loaves and two small fishes in the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. And he’s the one who tried to introduce some Greeks to Jesus in John 12. His personality seems to be the polar opposite of his brother Peter. He seems happy to stay out of the limelight (he very rarely speaks in scripture), and I picture him as a “never met a stranger” type.
- **James** – Son of Zebedee. John’s brother. Fisherman. He and his brother were known as Boanerges – the Sons of Thunder (probably because of their loud voices, and their powerful preaching). He and John asked Jesus if they could bring fire down from heaven on a Samaritan village because they wouldn’t receive them (an arrogant, undiscerning thing to say, which resulted in a rebuke from Jesus – Luke 9:51-56). He and John also had a sinful ambition to be the greatest in Christ’s kingdom, which caused contention and strife among the twelve (Matthew 20:20-28). James must have been a prominent figure in the early church, stirring things up, because when it came time for Herod to try to hurt the church, he killed James (Acts 12:2) – the only apostle martyred in scripture.
- **John** – Son of Zebedee. James’s brother. Fisherman. He is often called the “Apostle of Love” because he says a lot about God’s love for His own, and our duty to love one another. John seems to have had a tender heart, wanting to make sure he was doing right in Christ’s eyes. For example, his conscience was pricked so he confesses to Jesus that they had forbidden a man from casting out devils in Jesus’s name “because he followeth not us” (i.e., “he’s not part of our group”). (Mark 9:33-50). He’s a very black and white person – there aren’t a lot of shades of gray, which you’ll see by reading his epistles. He’s also humble – he never refers to himself by name in his Gospel. Only he

and Peter followed Jesus after his arrest, with John being able to go inside the high priest's palace because he knew the high priest. John is the only apostle who witnessed the Crucifixion, and it was to John that Christ committed the care of His mother Mary as He was dying (John 19:25-27). John went on to write five books in the New Testament.

- **Philip** – not the same Philip as the one in Acts 8 with the Ethiopian eunuch. He grew up in Bethsaida, with Peter and Andrew. He was friends with Nathanael and was likely a fisherman (see John 21:2). He was the first apostle that Jesus personally sought out – he was the first to answer the call directly from Jesus to “Follow me.” (John 1:43). The first thing he did was to go get Nathanael and say, “We have found Him...” (John 1:45). When feeding the 5,000, Philip is the one that Jesus proved by asking, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). Some commentators believe that Jesus chose Philip to ask the question to because he was the “provider” of the group – the one in charge of logistics. We’ll run into Philip again in John 14.
- **Bartholomew** – very likely the same as Nathanael. Fisherman. He was from Cana (where Christ performed His first miracle). He was friends with Philip, and probably had spent a lot of time pouring over the scriptures with Philip, looking for the Messiah. He’s the one who said, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). [There may have been a little bit of small-town rivalry and prejudice in that question, but the fact is that Nazareth generally was looked upon with contempt]. Jesus pronounced him to be “an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47).
- **Matthew** – aka Levi. Publican (tax collector). Publicans were universally despised and known as extortioners and thugs. They were considered to be sell-outs to the Romans and were viewed as traitors by the Jewish people. When Matthew was called by Jesus, he abandoned that life immediately and followed Him. The first thing he did was to make a feast in Christ’s honor, where he invited his fellow publicans and sinners (Luke 5:29-32), no doubt to tell them of this great salvation. He doesn’t say much about himself, but we can glean from the book of Matthew that he was very well-versed in scripture. He quotes/references the Old Testament the better part of 100 times.
- **Thomas** – aka Didymus. His name means “twin.” Fisherman. He is the melancholy pessimist of the group. He’s the one who said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16) and gained the nickname “Doubting Thomas” by his reaction to reports of Christ’s resurrection (John 20:25). He made what I would consider one of the greatest statements of faith in Christ in all scripture – “My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28). We will see more of Thomas in John 14.
- **James** – aka James the Less. The son of Alphaeus. He’s called “the less” to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee – either because he was short in stature, or he was younger than the other James. Some people have concluded that he is the brother/cousin of Jesus and wrote the book of James (this is unclear). In the Gospels, he never speaks, and never has anything attributed to him as an individual. I think that can

be instructive to us. He was probably a man who just faded into the background, quietly and faithfully doing his work, not drawing a whole lot of attention to himself.

- **Simon Zelotes** – aka Simon the Canaanite (“Canaanite” means “zealous”). The reason he is called “Zelotes” is because he was likely part of a Jewish sect called the “Zealots.” These would have been the ultra-patriotic Jews who despised Rome, didn’t want to pay their taxes, and wanted to overthrow the Roman government. Some were assassins who would covertly kill Roman officials and pro-Roman Jews. Today we might call them “terrorists” or “extremists.” Josephus said that they “agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions; but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty and say that God is to be their only Ruler and Lord” and he notes that their behavior precipitated the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Were it not for the grace of God, this man would have absolutely despised someone like Matthew, and would have even rejected Christ for saying “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.” As far as what scripture tells us about him, there is nothing else. He is an obscure character, like James.
- **Judas** - aka Lebbaeus Thaddaeus. The brother of James. Some believe that he was the brother of Jesus and wrote the book of Jude (this is unclear). Lebbaeus means “a man of heart” and Thaddaeus means “large hearted” or “child of one’s heart” or “bosom child.” In other words, he probably had a special place in his parents’ hearts – maybe a firstborn, or the youngest child (and the personality traits that would go along with that). In the Gospels, he’s recorded as saying one thing, and we will get to it in John 14.
- **Judas Iscariot** – whenever he’s mentioned in scripture, it’s always in connection with him being a traitor. Some believe Iscariot means “man of Kerioth” which was a town in Judah. This man was the treasurer of the group, was a thief, loved money, and betrayed the Lord Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (see John 12:6; Matthew 26:15).

Now, I spent all that time telling you about these guys to show you that they had different personalities, different backgrounds, different experiences. Some knew each other already and were friends or blood relatives. Some had been loners. Some shared an occupation (at least 7 were fishermen). We can probably each identify with one or more of them.

Apart from Judas Iscariot, we might tend to elevate these guys to some mythical status, but remember that they were common, ordinary men, just like we are. In fact, please don’t think of any of our fellow saints in scripture as anything other than what they were – fallen sons and daughters of Adam, saved by grace. These apostles are presented in the Gospels as they were – “warts and all.” They thought sinful thoughts. They said sinful words. They did sinful things. But they were all (except the son of perdition) saved by grace. They had left all to follow Christ (Luke 18:28), stayed with Him after He offended everyone by preaching about the doctrine of election (John 6), and continued with Him in His temptations (Luke 22:28). And you’d be hard-pressed to find a group of people that more fittingly exemplifies the following:

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, [are called]: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, [yea], and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

But don't underestimate their importance, and don't think too lowly of them. These were the guys that Christ hand-picked to be the foundation of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19-20), and it is through their faithful work that we have a church today.

The significance of the foot washing

There is a figurative, spiritual significance here, and there is a very practical significance. We learn about the spiritual significance in Christ's dialogue with Peter:

“Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also [my] hands and [my] head. 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. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.” (John 13:6-11)

This is vintage Peter here – he's the only one of the disciples that opens his mouth, and in the space of a few seconds, he tells Jesus that He's doing too much and then he tells Him that He's not doing enough. I think we can all identify with Peter when he says, “dost **thou** wash **my** feet?” But when Jesus answers him and basically says, “I'm doing this; you don't understand why I'm doing it, but you'll understand later,” Peter should have stopped talking. Instead he says, “thou shalt **never** wash my feet” (heavy emphasis on the word “never”). JFB: *“It is not humility to refuse what the Lord deigns to do for us, or to deny what He has done, but it is self-willed presumption.”* Trapp: *“This was an immoderate modesty, a proud humility; so it is in them that refuse gospel comforts, because they are unworthy.”* Often times God does something and we don't understand why He's doing it. Those are the times that we should quietly submit to His sovereign will, rather than thinking that we know better and are in a position to instruct God on what He should and shouldn't be doing.

But it's this outburst by Peter that gives Jesus the opportunity to tell us a precious truth. What He says tells us that this act of foot washing isn't merely an act of foot washing – there is a deep spiritual meaning behind it. “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” If Jesus

doesn't wash you, you have no part with Him. You have no fellowship. You have no communion. Peter understood that there was more to this than a simple foot washing, which is why he requests that Christ wash his whole body. And here is Christ's answer: "He that is washed needeth not save to wash [his] feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean."

Now, there's a nuance here that you won't see unless you look at the Greek words. When he says "he that is washed," the underlying word means "bathe the whole body." When he says "wash his feet," the underlying word means "wash a part of the body." The allusion is to what I said earlier: you take a bath, your whole body is clean, but you go out and walk on the dusty roads and your feet get dirty. You don't have to take a whole bath again; you just need to wash your feet. The meaning is, "you're already clean. I've already washed you. My blood has cleansed you from all sin (1 John 1:7). You're saved by the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). But you're going to accumulate filth as you walk through the world, and if you want to have any fellowship with me, it's going to need to be washed off as you go." This is why it's appropriate and required to continue to ask the Lord to forgive us:

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Matthew 6:12)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

[We see a type of this in the Old Testament laver in Exodus 29:4 and 30:19. When the priests were consecrated, they were required to cleanse their whole bodies. From that point forward, when they engaged in priestly service, they were only required to wash their hands and feet.]

Now, you'll notice that Jesus hasn't died yet when He says this, but He uses the present tense: "ye **are** clean." He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). That death of Christ was such a sure thing that His blood had already cleansed them even though He hadn't died yet on the cross. But He didn't die for Judas! "Ye are clean, but not all." Judas wasn't clean. The blood of Christ never cleansed Judas – not from eternity past, not now, not ever. Judas was not a saved person who lost his salvation – he never had it in the first place! He was never clean! This is a good text on the limited design of the atonement of Christ.

The other major significance of the foot washing is very practical for us and should impact how we live our lives day by day. Let's look at the text again:

"He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 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...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? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for [so] I am. If I then, [your] Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John 13:4-5, 12-17).

Our Master and Lord donned Himself in the servant’s garb, and performed this menial, servile task. And He did this as our example. He could have simply commanded them to be humble, but He knew the message would be more forceful if He showed them. He wasn’t instituting a new ordinance here – He was doing it as an example. The meaning is that we should have the heart of a servant, and foot-washing is an example of that. If our loved ones need help in any way, we shouldn’t think of ourselves as being above that, or too important for it. That’s the message. It’s a message of humility in service. If the God of eternity will stoop to wash feet, we don’t have any excuse to not humbly serve our loved ones. We are servants, and we have been sent out to obey our Master and follow His example. We should be “clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5) just like He was.

“But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-28)

It’s not enough to know that you’re supposed to do it, beloved – you have to actually do it. I said earlier that you might gain a new understanding and leave out of here a different person than you came. If you understand that Christ became a servant for you, that ought to encourage you to become a servant for your loved ones. Matthew Henry: *“When we see our Master serving, we cannot but see how ill it becomes us to be domineering.”*

As a segue into the topic of the next sermon (“Identifying the Traitor”), isn’t it interesting that Judas was here? He apparently had his feet washed just like the other apostles. Maybe we can learn a little something from that about what it means to love your enemies. Or maybe we can learn that the visible church of Christ will always have people who aren’t actually saved in it, but while they’re here, we have a duty to serve them. It certainly shows us that if a Satanic, deceptive traitor can weasel his way into the upper room on the night before Christ’s crucifixion, a Satanic, deceptive traitor can show up anywhere. But more on that next time.

I love you. Amen.