

March 14, 2021

“Lessons from the Foot Washing”

John 13:1-17

FCF: Our struggle with pride before God and one another

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has loved us “to the end.”

(magnet) Our response must be a life of humility.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

I mentioned a few weeks ago having recently read Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. It really is a great story. The plot centers on the turbulent relationship between Elizabeth Bennet, the daughter of country gentleman, and Fitzwilliam Darcy, a rich aristocratic landowner. There is an understandable temptation for the reader to try and discern who is the proud and who is the prejudiced. Darcy accuses Elizabeth of pride. She accuses him of prejudice. Yet they are each guilty of a pride that leads to prejudice. And they are not alone. There is hardly a character in the novel that is free of this. Which may be something Jane Austen means to convey to the reader. Pride and prejudice afflicts us all. The difficulty is in seeing and saying this of ourselves.

Jesus knows well this common affliction. And, in His love for us, He addresses it.

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 13:1-17](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

([READ John 13:1](#)) This is a dramatic moment. The “hour” has come. Jesus knows this is the final stage of His mission. And so “He loved them to the end” – not simply that He loved them “as long as He could” but that He loved them “as much as He could,” to the uttermost.

And how? Notice what Jesus didn’t do. John tells us Jesus was aware of this plot and coalition against Him. You or I would vaporize Judas and trample Satan on the spot. But He doesn’t. Note what He does instead. Jesus washes the disciples’ feet - including Judas’. The setting is a meal, the Thursday before Good Friday. As a gesture of hospitality, the host would provide water for the feet of his guests. The lowly job of loosing the sandals and washing the feet was meant to be a servant’s task. But the meal this night was likely eaten in secret and so there was no servant there. And the custom was for this to be done before the meal. None of the disciples volunteer. Not before, during, or after. So Jesus “rose from supper” to serve them.

What’s going on here? “He loved them to the end.” It’s a picture of what Jesus was to do for them on the cross and what they were to do for each other. This was a powerful moment impressed and imbedded upon their memories. What do we make of this? Jesus has loved us “to the end” and our response must be a life of humility. Our response must be a life of humility.

How so? In two ways. First, in the confessing of our sin. Second, in living as servants.

I. CONFESSING OUR SIN

This humility first expresses itself in the confessing of our sin. And this in two ways.

A) Once for All

It begins with an absolutely necessary once-for-all confession ([READ John 13:5-8](#)).

1. The dialogue

Peter is indignant. He could not understand how the Messiah could possibly go to the cross and so he could not understand the symbols that pointed towards it. Jesus washing his feet? But Jesus presses the point and insists on the absolute need for Peter to be thoroughly washed.

2. The implication

This is clearly symbolic, pointing to the cleansing that will come through Jesus' work on the cross. The idea here being that we must all trust Jesus as our Savior to have our sins forgiven once and for all. And so Jesus is saying to Peter, "Peter, if you don't get this, you don't get Me."

B) Continually

But with this initial washing must then come continual washings ([READ John 13:9-10](#)).

1. The dialogue

Peter, ever exuberant in his responses, then swings over to the other extreme. This then opens up the opportunity for Jesus to deliver yet another vital teaching point - one we truly need to hear.

2. The implication

As we move about, our feet "pick up dirt" that needs to be washed off. That is, once a follower of Jesus is saved from sin's penalty, once we have received that initial washing, we still need daily cleansing from our daily sin. We need frequent confession and ongoing acceptance of the Lord's forgiveness. The Apostle John says this elsewhere quite clearly ([READ 1 John 1:5-10](#)).

This is simply the gospel applied and embraced on a daily basis.

Illustration:

The *News Literacy Project* is dedicated to a single important purpose: helping people discern fact from fiction in news sources. Such a group does much needed work today, giving us fact-checking tools as we compare stories from various news outlets, cutting through the spin.

We need such a treatment on our own hearts. Jack Miller wrote in *Repentance* ([READ](#)):

We must stop parading around as a shell of a person, living as those that T. S. Eliot called "hollow men." Ask the Holy Spirit to make you willing to be searched by God ([Psalm 139:23-24](#)). And in turn, you will realize you are truly known by him. Do not expect the process of searching to be always painless and pleasant. No, hardly. But you will begin to have the joy of a clear conscience and a deepening fellowship with Christ as you realize He is unafraid of what He exposes, willing to heal, awaiting your return to Him. As you learn to thirst after Christ and drink of Him, you will find the living waters of the Holy Spirit flowing through you ([John 7:37-39](#)). No longer will you be the shiny appearance of something good, but you will be really living—and from you waters will overflow into others' lives.

One of the things Martin Luther stated in those 95 Theses he nailed to the door was this ([READ](#)):

Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when he said, "Repent," willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

Application:

What do we learn? Sin breaks fellowship with God. Denying it exists or presents any problems won't work. That only makes things worse. We need to go to the Lord regularly in repentance and confession. But this raises a question. "If the gospel message is that there is no condemnation in Christ and that our guilt has been removed, how does our sin get in the way?"

Here's the answer. The cross has settled the matter as far as punishment for sin is concerned. But the cross also brings us into a relationship with God – a relationship that cannot be severed but can still be affected. We cannot utterly cut ourselves off from Him but we can certainly distance ourselves from Him. Much as a rebellious child with a loving parent.

The need of both the once-for-all and continual washings calls for the examination of our hearts (**READ Psalm 139:23-24**). We need to be continually going to the Lord here. Again, Jesus has “loved (us) to the end.” Our response is a life of humility, confessing our sin to Him.

II. LIVING AS SERVANTS

That's the first lesson here. The second, rooted in that, is that we need to then learn to live as servants. For this isn't just something to ponder. It's something to imitate, for us to do.

A) Knowing Who He Is

Which begins with knowing who Jesus is, who it is that has done this and called us to do the same (**READ John 13:12-15**). Jesus calls them to consider the titles they were using for Him.

1. Lord

“Lord” – at minimum, it was a term of respect. It later came to mean far more than that.

2. Teacher

“Teacher” – this One before them is one with wisdom and knowledge they did not have.

The idea being if the disciples knew Jesus to be their Lord and Teacher, they should readily accept His direction and follow His example. They were to take seriously who He is.

B) Knowing Who We Are

And from there, He calls them to consider who they were (**READ John 13:16**).

1. Servants

They were “servants” – bond-servants, slaves. Owned, bought, controlled by another.

2. Messengers

They were “messengers” – sent on a mission, an errand. Instructed, commanded by another.

Consider who you are. No slave has the right to judge any task to be beneath him. And no messenger has the right to think he is exempt from their assigned job. Know who you are.

C) Knowing Whose We Are

But know also whose you are. Be sure and certain of your identity and mission.

1. What Jesus knew and did

What Jesus says here is tied to what we have been studying the last several weeks (**READ John 13:34**). Part of the way Jesus has loved us has to do with the security and certainty He had as to His authority, origin, and destiny (**READ John 13:3-4a**). Do you see how that is tied together?

2. What they should know and do

And the same should be for us. Knowing whose we are, being assured of His love for us, grounded in our identity and our mission, out of that we are to love and to serve one another.

Again, this is the gospel applied and lived out on a daily basis.

Illustration:

Let me come back to this temptation we have towards spin. Think of how much of our lives and our energy is wasted on trying to elevate ourselves, to secure others' opinion, to prove our worth. And so we busy ourselves and wear ourselves out in pursuit of all this. It's just spin.

Because of Jesus, we can have done with that. We can leave all that behind. Our deep security is in Him. And that allows and frees and impels us to serve one another in a real way.

Application:

(**READ John 13:17**) Now, what would it mean for us to do this? Following Christ is not a spectator sport. So what does it mean for us to wash one another's feet? Think of what is involved in the actual washing of another's feet. What does it take? You have to slow down. You have to move towards them. You have to stoop low. And you have to give up your rights. What service is hard for you to give to others? What would be well nigh impossible to give up?

Then, in terms of what makes this hard for us, who comes to mind? Again, in terms of the literal washing of feet, some feet stink because of where they've been and so we don't want to touch them. And some feet have hurt us because of where they've stepped – on us, leaving ugly tracks on our hearts. And so we cannot bear the thought of rendering any kindness there.

But listen to what our Savior says. See what He has done. He has loved us “to the end” and is calling us to do the same. Our response to this love is to then live humbly and to serve.

CONCLUSION:

The foot-washing is a picture of what Jesus was to do for the disciples and what they were to do for each other. We are to let Him wash us. And we are to wash the feet of others.

Before we go, something else should be said of the obstacles to this. At its root, it's really simply pride. Pride leads to failure to confess and a slowness to serve. Spiritual vitality cannot breathe where there is pride. For pride chokes the spiritual life. I was reminded of this recently in reading about Mt. Vesuvius and the destruction of Pompeii back in the 1st century. People died in all kinds of terrible ways in that eruption – not just by lava, heat, falling debris, but by volcanic fumes. Not as dramatic but just as deadly. Such fumes don't have a strong odor, are denser than air and so, unlike smoke, collect near the ground. And they will choke you.

The fumes of pride choke the spiritual life. That's connected to the two points in our text – the confessing of our sin and the giving of ourselves in service. You can't do one without the other. It is only as our pride is crushed in going to Jesus that our delusions of superiority over others is done away with. It is only as we are reminded of who we are in Christ and whose we are as well that we will then be freed and impelled to go and then love as we have been loved.

Jesus has indeed “loved (us) to the end.” Our response must be a life of humility.

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