

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet (Part I)

John 13:1-11

February 12, 2006

INTRODUCTION

- The public ministry of Jesus Christ has now ended in the Gospel of John.
- John quickly fast-forwards to the night in which Jesus was betrayed:

Thursday Evening, 15 Nisan [the first night of Passover]

Verse 1

- John begins this chapter by giving us a time marker: “before the Feast of the Passover...”
 - Given the context of this passage, what John means is “immediately before the Passover meal (i.e. the Last Supper) began...”
- The Evangelist then states, “Jesus knowing that His *hour* had come that He would depart out of the world to the Father...” [emphasis added]
 - John reveals here that the two primary markers of time – (1) the Jewish Festivals [specifically, Passover], and (2) Jesus’ “hour” [the “hour” He is to be crucified] – converge to powerfully illustrate the significance of what is about to occur.
- John concludes this Verse with the words, “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”
 - The first point John makes in this Verse is that Jesus “**loved His own.**”
 - Some view “His own” in this context as referring to the Twelve disciples present with Him.
 - However, in light of the truth that this setting is in the shadow of the Cross [the phrase “He loved them to the end” emphasizes this], on which Jesus Christ will atone for the sins of the “whole world,” the phrase “His own” must refer to **all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ**, from all tribes and nations, from all ages.

- The second point is that Jesus “loved them to the end.”
 - This is a classic case of double meaning in the Gospel of John.
 - Given the original Greek phrase, here, it can mean **“He loved them *to the uttermost.*”**
 - Other interpretations include, “love to the last breath” and “love in its highest intensity.”
 - However, it can also be taken with reference to time, meaning, **“He loved them *to the end of His life.*”**
 - Of course, both are true.

Jesus Christ loved His own to the uttermost. So much, in fact, that as the Good Shepherd, He loved them to the point of laying His life down for them on the Cross of Calvary – He truly “loved them to the end.”

Verse 2

- In this next Verse, John informs us that the plot to betray Jesus has already begun.
- He states, “the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot...to betray Him...”
 - Once again, given the Greek context of this verse, it can have one of two meanings:
 - First, it can mean [as the NASB interprets it]: “the devil...already put into the heart of Judas...”
 - Secondly, however, it can mean, “the devil had already made up *his* mind that Judas...”
 - Regardless of the most accurate interpretation, though, what is clear is that Satan and Judas were conspiring “behind the scenes” in an effort to betray Jesus.
 - As one scholar [Ridderbos] put it, “Here is the demonic starting point in the process that pervades the entire story from start to finish as a chain of faithlessness that extended from Judas to the Sanhedrin, from the Sanhedrin to Pilate, and from Pilate to the executioners.”

Verse 3

- John now explains to the reader that “the Father had given all things into His [Jesus] hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God...”
 - Jesus “came forth from God” when the “Word became flesh,” at the Incarnation.
 - He was to go “back to God [the Father]” by way of the Cross of Calvary.

- It is therefore fascinating that in light of this truth, John emphasizes the sovereignty of God, saying, “the Father had given all things into His hands...”
- Yet, **this statement reveals that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not a satanic victory, but a divinely ordained event in perfect accordance with the sovereign will of Almighty God.**
- As scholar Leon Morris states, “The threshold of Calvary seems an unlikely place for a statement of sovereignty like this. But John does not view the cross as the casual observer might view it. It is the place where a great divine work was wrought out and the divine glory shown forth.”

Verses 4-5

- It is clear that the setting here is now one where the disciples are reclining on thin mats around a table, each leaning, likely, on their left arm.
- Then Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, God incarnate, does the unthinkable – He rises from the table and begins to wash His disciples’ feet.
 - In first century Palestine, few acts would have demonstrated humility more powerfully than the washing of another person’s feet. In a time when the common mode of transportation was walking, the feet were considered to be [and certainly were in actuality] the most unclean part of the body.
 - Some Jews in the first century insisted that foot washing was an act to menial for Jewish slaves and should only be performed by Gentiles (*Mekbilta*, 1 on Exodus 21:2).
 - Furthermore, it was unthinkable for a superior to wash the feet of a subordinate.
 - Although the practice of foot washing was normal in this day, it was done when one entered into a home after walking a long way – never after the guests had reclined at the table.
 - **Once again, Jesus was willing to break with social norms in order to demonstrate an eternal truth.**
 - This was why John the Baptist’s words concerning Jesus in John 1:27 were so significant, “It is He [Jesus Christ] who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”
 - An ancient rabbinical saying went, “Every service which a slave performs for his master shall a disciple do for his teacher except the loosing of his sandal-thong (strap).”

- Before He washes their feet, however, John informs the reader that Jesus “laid aside His garments...”
 - Therefore, Jesus was embracing the dress of a lowly non-Jewish slave (*Mek. Exod.* 21.2).
 - So “lowly” were such slaves like this viewed in first Century Palestine that even the Gentiles looked down on them (SB 2.557; Suetonius, *Caligula*, 26).
 - It is interesting that rabbis of this day stressed the importance of personal humility, but even they set limits as to the level one was expected to “stoop” (*y. Sanh.* 11.3)
 - Unlike the rabbis, however, there was no such boundary in the life of Jesus Christ. He would stoop to the lowest level possible to fulfill the will of the Father and redeem “His own.”
 - This act of Jesus [laying “aside His garments”] powerfully demonstrates what the Apostle Paul reveals in Philippians 2:5-7:
 - “Christ Jesus...who although He existed in the form of God...***emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...***”
 - Further, the laying of His garments also parallels the truth Jesus, the Good Shepherd, “**lays down His life for His sheep**” (John 10:11).
- The act of washing His disciples’ feet also underscores Jesus’ words in Luke 22:27 and Mark 10:45, “For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”
- Notice as well, that Jesus washed the disciples’ feet – which would have included His betrayer – Judas Iscariot – demonstrating the call to love one’s enemies as well.

Verses 6-7

- In response to the actions of Jesus, Peter asks the question, “Lord, do You wash my feet?”
 - The Greek context of this verse implies that what Peter is asking is, “Are *you* Lord going to wash *my* feet?”
 - There is no question that Peter [and doubtless, the other disciples as well] is confused by the actions of Jesus.
 - Once again, those closest to Jesus are as confused by His actions as those who are against Him [i.e. the Jews].
- Jesus then responds to Peter by saying, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.”
 - Likely, what Jesus means is that after His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and ascension, He and the Father will send the Holy Spirit. Through the illumination of

the Holy Spirit, Peter and the others will reflect back on this event and will understand the symbolism and significance of it.

Verses 8-9

- Peter responds in a manner that is typical for him, given his impetuous and hot-headed personality. He strongly objects to Jesus' actions, stating, "Never shall You wash my feet!"
 - At first glance, the words of Peter may seem honorable; however, they reflect great pride and ignorance concerning the work of Jesus and His earthly mission.
 - As someone [MacGregor] once put it, "**Peter is humble enough to see the incongruity of Christ's actions, yet proud enough to dictate to his master.**"
 - In the final analysis, Peter is challenging the actions of the eternal Creator of the universe!
- Jesus, then, responds to Peter, saying, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."
 - **The words of Jesus, here, reveal the true meaning behind the foot washing.**
 - The words of Jesus, specifically "wash," once again, reflect the great use of "double meaning" in this Gospel.
 - First, on the surface, Jesus' words mean that if Peter does not let Jesus wash his feet, he (Peter) may not eat the meal with Jesus.
 - However, more significantly, Jesus' words mean that if Jesus does not "wash" Peter of his sins, then he cannot have a part with Jesus.
 - In Luke 15:12, the idea of "having a part" refers to an inheritance.
 - Even more, 1 John 1:7 states,
"...the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin..."

Therefore, if Jesus does not wash Peter [and us] clean from all sin, through His shed blood and death on the Cross, then we have no eternal inheritance with Him as children of God.

Therefore, it is clear now, that the significance of foot washing is directly related to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Just as the act of foot washing was a supremely humble act, so the Cross of Calvary demonstrated the supreme humility of Christ;

And just as foot washing washed the feet clean from dirt, the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary washed away the sins of “the world” – those whom Jesus “loved to the end” – “His own.”

- No doubt, Peter did not understand the deeper meaning of Jesus’ words (i.e., that the foot washing foreshadowed the Cross); however, he still responded strongly, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.”
 - **Yet again, Peter misses the point!**
 - He goes from one extreme to the other.
 - **Peter’s eyes are on the physical world, not the spiritual. It is not the quantity of cleansing that is important, it is the quality, the nature of the cleansing.**
 - Morris states, “Peter is reluctant to let Jesus do what he wants. He prefers to dictate the terms. There is also a misunderstanding of the meaning of the action. It is not a way of cleansing the disciples, but a symbol of that cleansing. It is not the area of skin that is washed that matters but the acceptance of Jesus’ lowly service.”

Verse 10

- Jesus, now, makes a deeply significant statement, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”
 - **In other words, those who have been washed by the blood of Jesus are declared “clean.” Although they need to daily wash themselves as they are sanctified, they do not need to “wash” again, for the atoning work of salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ in their lives was a one-for-all event, never to be repeated.**
 - It is significant that Jesus uses the feet as the part of the body that is to be daily cleansed. Possibly the reason for this is because the feet are the part of the body that symbolically and literally have contact with the world.
 - John Calvin wrote, “as Christ washes from the head to the feet, those whom he receives as his disciples, so in those whom he has cleansed, the lower part remains to be daily cleansed. The children of God are not altogether regenerated on the first day, so as to aim at nothing but the heavenly life; but, on the contrary, the remains of the flesh continue to dwell in them, with which they maintain a continued struggle throughout their whole life.”
 - The early Baptist theologian John Gill wrote, “he who is washed in the blood of Christ: such a one is all over clean; not that he has no sin in him, nor commits any; but as he is washed in the blood of Christ, and justified by his righteousness, he is wholly and entirely clean in the sight of God; and so is perfectly clean through the word or sentence of justification and absolution pronounced on him, which must be understood in a forensic or law sense. Yet, the feet of his life and conversation,

which are continually gathering dirt...need daily washing in the blood of Christ; and therefore recourse must be constantly had to that foundation to wash in, for sin and for uncleanness.”

- **This is the difference between JUSTIFICATION and SANCTIFICATION; positional righteousness versus practical righteousness.**
- As John MacArthur wrote, “Basically, God’s gift of salvation in Christ brings a believer into a position of righteousness. God imputes the perfect righteousness of His Son to the believer, and thereby declares him righteous positionally. But as you know full well, believers still have sin in their lives – Christians are not practically righteous, 100% of the time. However, it is on the basis of our positional righteousness, that we are exhorted to strive for practical righteousness in our daily lives.”
- When Jesus, then, states, “and *you* are clean...,” the word *you* is plural, referring to the disciples. Yet, the one who is not clean is, of course, Judas.

Verse 11

- In this final Verse, John reveals the obvious: the one who is not “clean” – apparently had not been “washed” by the blood of Jesus Christ – was Judas, “the one who was betraying Him.”

✳ Read **Psalm 51**