

May 17, 2015

The Humility of Disciple-making

John 13:1-17

BI: Discipleship is not for the proud and self-preserving but for those who will humble themselves to serve and be served.

As we prepare to plant a new church in just a few weeks the topic of making disciples has taken a place of fresh significance. This is our mission. Christ's final words have become our first concern. His commission upon us is this: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you even to the end of the age."

Beloved, there is no ambiguity about the church's mission. We are sent to make disciples of Jesus Christ. But the manner in which we are to make disciples is not intuitive to the sin-stained mind - even of Christian men and women. Left to our own wits and creativity we would come up with all kinds of ways to make disciples that would not be in accord with the mind of God. Learning how to make disciples His way requires revelation. We need Jesus to show us how. And so He does (at least in part) here in our text for this morning.

We are all familiar with this narrative and justly surprised at Jesus' actions here in the upper room. But our surprise is nothing compared to the utter shock experienced by Peter and the other disciples. A foot-washing slave was not exactly their idea of the coming Messiah. They imagined Him to be a conquering hero who would save God's people from national oppression and set the captives free (for so it was foretold by the prophets). When Jesus came, however, He did not come to judge the world but to save it from the just and holy wrath of God.

The mission of His first visit to the world was to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows. He came to be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The chastening for our well-being would fall on Him and by His wounds we would be healed. God would cause the sin of us all to fall upon Him, and He would be slaughtered like a lamb to bear the punishment that we have both earned and deserve. That is why He came.

He didn't come as a conquering King, but as a humble servant. In His own words, "The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to Give His life a ransom for many." His disciples, however, were having a hard time accepting his oft-repeated teaching on the high calling to humble service. This becomes abundantly clear when Jesus comes to Peter to wash His feet.

Read 6-10

In the previous message on this text we talked a lot about Jesus' model of humble service and how we as His disciples need to follow His example by laying aside pride and taking the posture of a servant in our ministry of making disciples. This morning, however, I want to focus on two things in particular:

1. The True Meaning of Bathing and Washing:
2. The Humble Practice of "Washing Feet":

I. The True Meaning of Bathing and Washing:

1. Bathing and washing are key terms in this passage. Jesus is washing His disciple's feet showing them with what humility they are to serve others even though they are apostles of the King. But Peter doesn't understand, so he protests strongly, "Never shall you wash my feet!" In the original language there is a double negative that serves to amplify the emphatic nature of Peter's outburst. In GK there is no way to make this statement any stronger or more emphatic.

2. Peter saw Jesus as Israel's King and He was determined to rescue his King from this indignity. The King will NEVER wash my feet for I am not even worthy to wash His (cf. John Baptist - not worthy to untie His sandals). Clearly, Peter missed Jesus meaning on a couple of different levels. First, He missed the teaching that in the economy of heaven the greatest will be slave of all. Peter was thinking in human terms as we so often do. He was thinking of leadership and authority as the world thinks of it; Leaders must be strong, commanding, never flinching, and never showing weakness. But here was Jesus scandalously taking on the very form of a common slave. Peter just didn't have a leadership category in his mind to explain such behavior! So he missed Jesus' point about servant leadership.

3. Second, Peter missed the meaning of washing and bathing (read 8-10). Notice the distinction that Jesus makes here. This is important because if all Jesus wanted to convey was the need for His disciples to minister as servants rather than rulers He could have just said so, but He doesn't. Rather, He reveals to Peter (and to us) a theological difference between bathing and washing.

4. Notice first (8) Jesus says, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." Then (10) "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean: and you are clean..." In other words, one who has already taken a bath doesn't need to take another bath when he discovers his feet are dirty. He only needs to wash his feet.

5. So what is "bathing" and what is "washing?" I want to submit to you that "bathing" must represent regeneration (salvation). It is a symbolic way to speak of the fact that God makes people spiritually "clean." Salvation is a kind of spiritual "bathing." By grace through faith a sinner is washed clean. All his guilt is cleansed and washed away by the "blood of the Lamb." Jesus even says here (10) that this bathing makes one "completely clean." So much so, in fact, that once you have been bathed once you NEVER have to do

it again. So one who is “bathed” is one who has been born again. He is saved, redeemed, justified, and regenerated by Spirit of God and nothing in all the world can change that. Once you are “bathed” you are “clean” in God’s sight forever by virtue of your union with Christ. From that moment on God sees you as clean, pure, and holy as Jesus Himself. But... that doesn’t mean that Christians don’t sin. To the contrary, every honest believer must admit that -this side of heaven – we are sinners all and sinners still.

6. This is why we need our feet “washed” on a regular basis. If “bathing” the whole body is a picture of salvation, then “washing” of feet is a picture of sanctification. What is Sanctification? It is the moment by moment, day by day process of growth and change into the likeness of Jesus Christ in personal and practical ways. Sanctification speaks of our becoming progressively more holy by the power of the Spirit and the Word.

7. So, as Jesus teaches His disciples the primary lesson of the need for extreme humility in our service of making disciples, he does so using practical metaphors for Justification and Sanctification.¹ Both are humbling doctrines.

A. In Justification we learn of our complete inability to save ourselves from the penalty of sin. The only way a sinner can be saved is by the sovereign mercy and grace of God on the merits of Jesus Christ.

B. Likewise, in Sanctification we learn that even after God declares us righteous because of Jesus’s active and passive obedience on our behalf, we are still sinners who need daily cleansing in order to maintain fellowship with God our Father. Every day of our lives we need to pray with David (Ps. 51), “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin... Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”

8. This, I believe, is the true meaning of bathing and washing. And Jesus (the ultimate disciple-maker) is doing this to teach His disciples the need for deep humility in our service to others as we make disciples. And that brings us to the second point. The first addressed The True Meaning of Bathing and Washing. The second addresses...

II. The Humble Process of washing Feet:

Read 12-17

1. Clearly, Jesus is teaching His men the importance of humility. We are not to see ourselves as Lords and rulers but as slaves of the King and humble servants of everyone else. This is abundantly clear. But let’s remember here that Jesus has also made it clear that washing feet is a picture of sanctification.

2. So what does it mean when Jesus says (14) “If I then, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”? I think there are two answers to

¹ See Andreas Kostenberger, *John*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2004), 406, and John MacArthur, *MacArthur N.T. Commentaries – John 12-21*, (Moody, 2008), 67-68.

this question. One is primary and the other, secondary and BOTH are extremely important.

3. Before we go there, however, let's be clear about one thing. Jesus is NOT establishing another ordinance for the church. He is not commanding that we engage in the practice of washing feet (although, I think in the right context with the right motive it can be a beautiful thing). There are a number of reasons why I think this is a proper conclusion, but the most important is this: Elevating this practice into a religious ritual minimizes the profound lesson Jesus is teaching His disciples. Any sinner can wash someone's feet as a ritual. But Jesus is calling us to something far more significant and far more difficult. And that brings us to the first answer to the question, "What does Jesus mean when He says "Since I washed your feet, you ought to wash one-another's."

4. First, Jesus is teaching us that in the social economy of heaven His disciples must see themselves as slaves of Christ and servants of people. His logic goes like this: if the Lord of glory was willing to humble Himself and take on the role of the lowest of slaves, how could My disciples do any less? Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' but do not follow my example?"² Jesus is calling us to the difficult work of banishing pride and all effort to promote and preserve self in favor of representing Him before men as humble servants who lay down their rights and even their lives for the good of others and the glory of God. This is the primary meaning of what Jesus did and said in this text. Nevertheless, there is clearly another important meaning here.

5. If "washing feet" is a picture of sanctification, then when Jesus commands us to wash one-another's feet He is commanding us to help one another in our pursuit of holiness and our progress in Christ-likeness.

6. No less than the great Puritan Pastor, Matthew Henry, applies Jesus' teaching here by saying,

This duty [washing feet] is mutual; we must both accept help from our brethren and afford help to our brethren. [This is a service of] sanctification one of another: You ought to wash one another's feet, from the pollutions of sin... We cannot satisfy for one another's sins, this is peculiar to Christ, but we may help to purify one another from sin. We must in the first place wash ourselves; this charity must begin at home (Mt. 7:5), but it must not end there; we must sorrow for the failings and follies of our brethren (1 Co. 5:2)... We must wash our brethren's polluted feet in tears. We must faithfully reprove them, and do what we can to bring them to repentance (Gal. 6:1), and we must admonish them, to prevent their falling into the mire; this is washing their feet.³

7. I think that nails it precisely. Jesus isn't talking about ritualism. He's talking about discipleship. He's teaching us that we need to be actively taking the posture of a lowly servant and wade into people's lives to encourage, and exhort, and correct, and rebuke, and restore, and anything else they need to become more like Jesus Christ. This is a humbling and often messy ministry, but it necessary and good. We need to be involved in

² John MacArthur, *MacArthur N.T. Commentaries – John 12-21*, (Moody, 2008), 68

³ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 2007). Peabody: Hendrickson.

one another's lives. We need to be washing each other's feet. As Kenneth Gangle observes, "First we ought to pray, "Lord, wash me"; then we need to pray, "Lord, help me wash others."

8. If this strikes you as foreign, let me take a minute to show you that this is everywhere in Scripture.

Job 4:3-4 One of Job's friends commended him by saying... "Behold you have admonished many, And you have strengthened weak hands. 4 "Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees." (He faithfully washed people's feet).

Psa. 26:2 "Examine me, O Lord, and try me. Test my mind and my heart." (He was asking the Lord to "wash his feet"). Once, God sent the prophet Nathan into David's life to do just that.

Psa. 141:5 "Let the righteous smite me in kindness, and reprove me. Do not let my head refuse it. (The psalmist was inviting others to wash his feet)

Prov. 28:23 "He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue."

Matt. 18:15-17 "If your brother sins, go to Him..." (wash His feet) – Don't go with a hammer, but with a Basin and Towel.

Gal. 6:1-2 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

1 Thes. 5:14 "We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone." (Wash their feet)

2 Tim. 2:24-25 "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." (Elders must be actively washing people's feet).

Heb. 3:12-13 "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you and evil unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God, but encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by the by the deceitfulness of sin." (Wash one another's feet "day after day")

James 5:19-20 James commends those who "turn a sinners back and save his soul from death."

Jud. 22-23 "Have mercy on some who are doubting, save others, snatching them out of the fire..."

9. The lesson here, beloved, is that when it comes to sanctification, we NEED one another. We need brothers and sisters to encourage and comfort us when we are down, to strengthen us with the truth when we doubt, to ask penetrating questions when we sin, and rebuke us when we resist repentance and remind us the promises of God and the glory of Christ and the everlasting reward reserved for those who persevere to the end. We NEED one another to wash our feet.

10. In his excellent book *Life Together* Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

Confess your faults one to another (Jas. 5:16). He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when

a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!⁴

11. Washing one another's feet means coming alongside one another as sinners and being honest about who we are and what we need. This is what Jesus did for His disciples, and this is what His apostles did all over the world. Failing to do so in the local church may justly be called a failure to love. Again, Bonhoeffer writes,

Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe [exhortation] that calls a brother back from the path of sin. It is a ministry of mercy, and ultimate offer of genuine fellowship, when we allow nothing but God's word to stand between us, judging and [comforting].⁵

12. You see, beloved, feet washing was never intended to be a ritual we mechanically perform to fulfill a religious duty. Jesus' call to wash one another's feet is a call to lovingly, and humbly serve one another in the ministry of sanctification. Making disciples is NOT merely about broadcasting the truth. It is about ministering the truth to one another's personal needs "day after day" as long as it is still called "today."

Application:

1. I praise the Lord for those of you who are making the sacrifices necessary to wash other's feet through the ministry of Biblical Counseling.
2. Others of you are meeting with people regularly for discipleship. You are washing their feet, helping them grow and change. I suspect there are a number of you to whom the Lord has granted some level of spiritual maturity over the years and you are fearful or reluctant to taking on a discipleship commitment. I want to exhort you to take the risk and discover the joy if being used by the Holy Spirit to wash someone's feet through discipleship.
3. Lastly, I praise the Lord for each of you who have had the courage to speak into my life to encourage, exhort, challenge, and even offer loving rebuke. You have washed my feet and I thank God for you. We are sinners all and we need one another to help us grow into the likeness Jesus Christ. That's where true joy in life is found no matter what our circumstances.

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⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*; (Harper One, 1954), 110

⁵ Ibid, 107)