

May 3, 2015

# The Basin and Towel

John 13:1-17

BI: Being a follower of Christ means not only believing what He says but also serving like He serves.

Introduction:

Solomon was right, “There is nothing new under the sun.” Men have always asked the same questions and have looked to the wrong things to find the answers. “What is the meaning of life?” “Where can I find fulfillment?” “What can satisfy the human heart?” These, and other question have been pondered for as many years and there have been human beings on the planet. And for the most part the proposed answers have always pointed back to a single personal pronoun, “Me.”

Sinful human beings are hardwired to be selfish creatures, and it might be argued that there has never been a time when that has been truer of society in general than right now. In the 1990’s media pundits referred to our time the “Me generation.” Now that we are living in the 2000’s, the “Me generation” has morphed into what might be called the “Selfy Generation.” People seem to be enamored with themselves more than anything else in heaven or on earth. Witness the fact that this is the first generation ever to be known primarily for the fact that we like to take pictures of ourselves and post them for the world to see, imagining all the while that other people actually want to see them.

I find it difficult to believe that the original purveyors of the Self Esteem gospel could have imagined that their revolution could have become so successful over such a short period of time. They told us that the answer to all our questions was to learn to love ourselves more, and here we are. Nevertheless, the problems of

mankind are more difficult and complex and further from being solved than ever before.

But, but as I said, we are not the first people to ever be guilty of selfishness. Even the disciples of the Lord Jesus found themselves almost incapable of suppressing a strong desire for self-promotion. On the other hand, Jesus was absolutely committed to teaching and modeling for them the importance of being a servant. Consider, for example, that the narrative before us this morning takes place the on the very night Jesus gets arrested. Think about that. If you knew that you only had a few precious hours with your family before you would be taken away to die, what would you want to say? What would you choose to do? Obviously, your last words and actions would be of paramount importance. In Jesus' case, He chose to model for His men the importance of being a servant.

The message of this passage is simple and clear. Being a follower of Christ means not only believing what He says but also serving like He serves.

None of the synoptic Gospels reveal that Jesus washed His disciples feet that evening, but John goes out of His way to emphasize it. So this morning I would like for us to look very briefly at John 13:1-17.

Read John 13:1-17

Jesus' public ministry is now over. He has nothing more to say to the crowds. He has taught them everything He came to teach. Aside from a few words spoken to those who arrest Him and those who interrogate Him, he has nothing more to say to anyone except His beloved disciples. This text is part of what is known as the "farewell discourse" and so everything Jesus has to say strikes us with the added import of being His final words.

## **I. The Paradox of Servanthood (1-4):**

1. Read 1-4

2. I want you to see the motivation behind Jesus' actions here.

There are several important facts about Jesus that John wants us to bear in mind before we read about what He did.

A. First, notice that Jesus knew His hour had come and that He would depart out of this world to the Father.

1) In other words, He knew that His ministry had come to a close. He knew that His assignment here on Earth was almost over and that within the next 48 hours, He would be home with the Father.

2) His humiliation was about to come to an end. His glory was about to be restored. He who is "the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of [God's] nature, and upholds all things by His powerful word" is about to make purification for sins and then "sit down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:3-4).

3) Jesus knew that in just a few very short hours, the joy set before Him these past 33 years would become an eternal reality, never to be thwarted or interrupted again. Soon He would regain His rightful place on the throne listening to the six-winged Seraphim and the living creatures crying out like the awesome sound of a mighty waterfall, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts, the Whole earth is full of His glory!"

4) O' how Jesus must have longed to go home!

B. Second, notice that He had loved and was continuing to love His disciples, even to the very end.

1) Here is a magnificent description of the

relationship between the thrice-holy God, and sinful, mortal men. He is the awesome and glorious, highly exalted One who sits on the eternal throne and makes earth his footstool. But oh, how he loves the selfish, whining, truth-suppressing, Christ-belittling people He has made! And the way He loves is by giving and serving. Yes, even giving to and serving we who were His enemies.

2) Oh, “Amazing love! How can it be?” He loves us! He loves us!

C. Third, notice (v. 2) that Jesus knew that the devil had already put it into Judas’ heart to betray Him.

1) In other words, he was well aware that one of the twelve sitting there at the table was about to deliver Him into the hands of evil men in order to put Him to death.

2) He knew He was about to be murdered, and the one responsible for that was sitting right there with Him pretending to be a loyal and faithful friend.

3) Jesus knew that!

D. Fourth, that Jesus knew His own authority and glory (v. 3).

1) He knew that “the Father had given all things into His hands. This is a declaration of absolute sovereignty over all things.

2) Also, He knew that He came forth from God, and was going back to God.” This is a declaration of Jesus’ eternal glory.

3. These are the things Jesus was acutely aware of as He got up from the table that night. Now, with all of that in mind, what

would we expect Jesus to do? Call a lightening bolt out of the sky to execute Judas on the spot? Have God speak in an audible voice again to spill Judas' plan? Call down a thousand angels to protect Him from the evil men who would soon be on their way to arrest Him? No.

4. Rather, He got up from the table, stripped down to His undergarment, wrapped himself in a towel, poured water into a common basin, kneeled down on the dirty floor and began washing the disciple's feet, and wiping them with the towel.

5. This is a great paradox, that the Sovereign Lord and King of all things should willingly make Himself the lowest servant and wash His disciple's feet.

6. Before this evening Jesus had taught his men many times about the essential posture of a faithful disciple; namely, that of a humble servant. He had even used himself as an example. In Mark 10:45 He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." Now He would teach it one final time through a living parable.

7. This was the paradox of Servanthood.

## **II. The Parable of Servanthood (5-11):**

1. One by one, Jesus moves from disciple to disciple, washing their feet and wiping them with his towel. Even Judas is tenderly and affectionately served by the hands of the One he would soon betray.

2. Eventually, however, He rounds the table to Peter's place. And there we experience the only wrinkle in this otherwise seamless story.

3. Peter sees the paradox here but clearly doesn't understand what Jesus is doing. He still doesn't understand the social economy of heaven – that the greatest in the kingdom are the servants of all. So he says to Jesus (v. 6), “Lord, do You wash my feet?” In other words, “Lord, I should be washing your feet! This isn't right! I will never allow you to wash my feet!”

4. But Jesus explains, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.”

A. Here we get our first glimpse into the mind of Christ behind this living parable. The washing of feet is a physical picture of a spiritual reality. That is, before a person can fellowship with Christ, he must be washed by Him. He must be free from sin in a way that only Christ can free him.

B. Washing their feet was not the means of cleansing the disciples from sin, but a symbol of the cleansing that Jesus would accomplish upon the cross. That's why Jesus told Peter, “You don't understand now, but you will very soon” (i.e. after the resurrection).

5. Of course, then Peter responds with his typical impulsivity, “Then Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and head also.”

A. So Jesus must explain that He still misunderstands the meaning of what He is doing. Those who have already been bathed need only to have their feet cleaned from time to time.

B. “You are already clean.” I take that to mean that they had already experienced regeneration. The price Jesus was about to pay on the cross for them has already been credited to their account by grace through faith. As far as God was concerned, they were already clean. Their faith, like Abraham's, had been accounted to them as

righteousness.

- C. In other words, when a believer sins, he doesn't need to get saved all over again. He just needs Jesus to come and wash His feet from time to time. And that's what happens when we humbly confess our sins.

6. Seen in this light we understand when Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He was putting on display what appeared to be an extreme posture of humility but which, in fact, was merely a vague shadow of the ultimate humility He would soon willingly submit to on their behalf. It's as if Jesus were saying, "You think what I am doing tonight is extreme and unrealistic? Wait until you see what I am going to do for you tomorrow.

7. In this case, the Greatest of all really is the Servant of all. But Jesus doesn't leave them to discover the application of the parable on their own. He explains it in direct terms.

8. From the Paradox of Servanthood, to the Parable of Servanthood, now we come to...

### **III. The Path of Servanthood (12-17):**

1. Read 12-16

2. Jesus is saying, "Listen to me. You guys need to get this before I go. You think you are so great. You think that you are better than those around you. I frequently hear you argue about which one of the greatest; which has the best ideas and superior ability. You exclude people and rebuke people because they are not part of your little group. You elevate yourselves and suppress everyone else. But let's put this into perspective. I am your Teacher and you are My students. The students aren't greater than their teacher are they? And slaves are not greater than their Master, are they? Now

if I, your Master, am willing to perform the most insignificant duties on behalf of the most insignificant people, what ought you to do?”

3. This is the attitude that should rule in the church of Jesus Christ.
  - A. Husband, you are not called to make your wife submit, but to pursue the blessing of bringing leadership to your home by serving your wife and children.
  - B. Wife, you are not called to fix your husband, but to pursue the joy of serving him and your children.
  - C. Children, you are not called to establish your own independence, but to pursue the peace that comes from submitting to and serving your parents.
  - D. Single men & women, God has given you extraordinary freedom right now to serve others without the burden of taking care of a spouse and children.
  - E. Congregation, you are not called to live in little cliques that judge and criticize other people in the body who do things differently than you, but to pursue the Joy that’s found in serving everyone in this body who has need according to the way God has gifted you to serve.

4. This is not meant to come across as heavy and burdensome. Because the fact is, it comes with a promise from Christ Himself: (v. 17) “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” Or, as he is quoted in Acts 20:35, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

5. I guess Paul said it better than any of us ever could when he wrote:



“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”(Phil. 2:5-8)

BI: Being a follower of Christ means not only believing what He says but also serving like He serves.

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**Practical/Theological Issues:**

Quotations:

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