

Mark 8: 34-38; “The Upper Room of Christian Discipleship”, Sermon
63 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on June 26th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.

The disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ has a desire which has been placed in their heart by the Holy Spirit, to be clean. They want to, as the Scriptures say, “cleanse themselves from all defilement (all filthiness) of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Just as important a thing as it is, for you to get up in the morning, and to take a shower, and to be clean entering into your day; it is even more important for the follower of Jesus to be clean spiritually in relation to everything that they are thinking, saying and doing. I think that it was Benjamin Franklin who said, “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Well, I would say that not only is cleanliness next to godliness, but it is an integral part of godliness; spiritually speaking. The way that I would like to approach this subject this morning is for us to turn to John Chapter 13. John Chapter 13 is the place that speaks more about being washed and being made clean, spiritually, than any other place in the Bible. It is in this passage that we will learn, 1st of all – Of the great love of our Lord Jesus for His disciples that makes this room so great and beautiful. (Verses 1-5) 2nd – We will learn that this precious ministry of Jesus is not always accepted right away, even by true disciples. (Verses 6-10) And 3rd – We will learn that it is the humble responsibility of every disciple of Christ to wash the feet of other disciples. (Verses 11-17)

1st – We want to think about the great love of our Lord Jesus Christ that makes this room so great and beautiful.

Verse 1 says: “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” “And supper being ended, the devil having already put it 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 had come from God and was going to God, rose from the supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.” “After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” This wonderful act of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for His disciples is not recorded for us in the other gospels; it is only found in this place. It is called, “His loving them to the end”. The Lord Jesus was very desirous to celebrate this Passover together with His disciples. He knew why He had come into the world and where He was going. He had come into the world to die for sinful men like you and me, and He was going to the cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The Passover was that annual feast commanded of all the Jews to observe; that supper of remembrance commemorating God's slaying of the firstborn of the land of Egypt, in order to convince Pharaoh to let the people go, so that they could be free from their bondage and hard labor, and go and worship God as He desired. God sent the death angel into the houses of the Egyptians and He slew all of their firstborn, but passed over the firstborn of Israel. God passed over them because they had the blood of a lamb which was slain, painted on their door-posts and their lintels. On that same night, before the death angel came, the Jews killed the Passover lamb, roasted it, and ate it. Each Hebrew man and His family who followed God’s instructions and partook of the Passover lamb would come to know God’s blessing of the deliverance from Egypt. But even more, if they had faith they would partake of the great salvation which would one day come in Christ, which was represented to them in this typical form. If they ate the lamb by faith, and put its blood on the doorposts of their house, believing in God’s provision of their escape from wrath and their freedom from bondage of sin, they would be saved.

The disciples of our Lord, in this Upper Room did not know it, but in their partaking of the Passover, they were by faith actually feeding upon the faithfulness of their Lord who would very shortly die for their sins, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His going to the cross would be the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice and feast. It was His great love for His disciples that led Him to the cross, to become a substitute for them as sinners. It was His great love that He willingly became a recipient of the punishment of the Father's wrath which we so richly deserve. It was in the Upper Room where He would plainly demonstrate to them what kind of a love it was that He had for them. It was a love which demonstrated itself in this wonderfully practical way of "rising from the supper, laying aside His garments, taking a towel, and girding Himself to serve." The Lord of Glory would kneel down and wash their dirty feet. Nothing but pure and holy love could motivate Him to do this.

As regards this room which Jesus and his disciples were in, where this washing of the disciples feet took place; it says in Mark 14, verse 13: "And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him.' "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The teacher says, 'Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" "Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and prepared; there make ready for us." Jesus and His disciples were in a guest room; a room borrowed from a kind man whom the Lord Jesus knew wouldn't mind its being used. He is unnamed. How many people there are, who are unnamed and not remembered in the minds of men, who will be remembered on the Day of Judgment and rewarded because they did some kindness in the name of Jesus Christ. Let your life be like this man. Be willing to do what you can for Christ when the Lord providentially sets the opportunity before you. This room was a large upper room in which the Passover was to be celebrated. This is where the Passover supper would take place. And this is where the washing of their feet would take place.

If the Passover supper is representative of Christ's willingness to go to the cross for us, then the towel and the basin are representative of His willingness to serve those who will take Him as their Savior. He came into this fallen world of sinners to make them clean in every area of their life. When the Lord Jesus undertakes to save you as a person, He does so, not only by showing you that He was willing to go to the cross to bear your sins; but He also shows to you His willingness to wash away all the sins which are related to your everyday living, and your walking through this world. You, as a disciple, are going to be tempted, tried, and tested in many ways, every day of your Christian life, after you believe in Jesus. You will be tempted to keep some of the commandments of God and not all of them. You will have opportunities for obedience or disobedience presented to you continually. You may, early on, make some wise and right choices concerning your following Jesus and being led into all the truth, and you will find your heart is elated with following Him.

And on the other hand, you may make some poor and foolish decisions at other times and find that your heart is dull; that you are unwilling to do what you know that your Lord would have you to do and to be. You will try, and try hard, to do the will of God with a sincere mind and clear conscience, and you may greatly succeed at some points, and utterly fail at others. Will you be cast out of the kingdom because you are this way? No, beloved. It is because the Lord Jesus has undertaken to love you, that He will love you to the end. You will go all the way through this life and into the next, in perfect favor with God because Jesus has begun to love you; and He will love you to the end. The Christian life is "onward and upward" for the disciple of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is three steps forward and one step back. But "the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the perfect day". All this light and all of your progress in the Christian life is because of the love of Jesus Christ toward you. Each and every one of your sins will be forgiven, and covered by His precious blood, and washed away. Each one of your hundreds of inconsistencies in obedience will be patiently born with, and Jesus will patiently teach you the good and right way to walk and live. You as a

disciple of Jesus Christ will not be practicing sin, but you are going to have dirty feet; and so you must come to see your need to have Him spiritually wash them. The bathroom of Christian discipleship is a part of this great and glorious Upper Room where Jesus washed His disciples feet, and you also as a disciple, must enter in. The spiritual cleansing of your heart, as one who is following Jesus, is something that Jesus undertakes to do for you, every day, because He loves you, as His disciple. If you are saved from your sins; be assured that He who has begun a good work in you will continue it until the Day of Christ. Christ's love will never leave you nor forsake you. He will never turn away from you from doing you good, to all eternity.

Now 2nd - We will learn that this precious ministry of Jesus is not always accepted right away, even by true disciples. (Verses 6-11)

Verse 6 says, "Then Jesus came to Simon Peter." "And Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet!'" "Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.'" "Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!'" "Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.'" Now, Judas gave every appearance of his being able to receive Jesus' ministry of washing his feet to himself; when really he was an unconverted man. Peter was just the opposite. Peter was a converted man, and he flat out refused it. "You shall never wash my feet!" The words in the Greek, here, are very strong. "You will never wash my feet forever; unto eternity." (J.C. Ryle) There are some persons, who like Peter are converted, but they do not understand the ministry of the Lord Jesus to themselves, in His washing them. And even though they have saving faith, they resist the idea that they need to be daily cleansed, even though they have committed themselves to following the Lord. They think to themselves: "If I am a person committed to following the Lord Jesus Christ, then that ought to be enough." "Does the Lord really have to clean up everything I think, everything I say, and everything I do?" They think that their Lord should not have to stoop to this. "Lord, are You washing my feet?", Peter says in verse 6. Peter thought that this was not a good thing; that His Lord would have to do this menial a task for him, when he could easily have done it himself. This is what he thought. But I think that what the Lord Jesus was doing for him also embarrassed him a little bit. I think that it embarrassed Peter that someone as great as his Lord was would feel that He would have to do this for him. Was he really that dirty; that this was necessary?

Sometimes it frightens a true disciple to see or to sense that their heart may still really have that much sin in it. Surely things cannot be that bad! I am a disciple. I am determined to follow Jesus and to do His will. But Jesus answers Peter in this tender and patient way in verse 7: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Let me say to you this morning; there are a great many things involved in living the Christian life; and you and I need to grasp this; that the Lord has to cleanse us in many ways that we may not understand fully now. He knows where you need to be cleansed, and sometimes you don't. Indeed we may not grasp it at all now; but we will later. He will show it to you later. He will prove it to you later; in your experience in this life, or in the day of Judgment, if somehow you don't learn it in this life. Trust me; Jesus is the wise Master teacher. But He is also the humble, loving Savior who loves you enough to wash you in every way that you need it. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

When you come to Jesus Christ, He will be your servant, spiritually, at many points. Peter needed to be served by the Lord Jesus, and cleansed by the Lord Jesus in his walk as a disciple, and yet he did not see it. He was very self-confident that He could serve the Lord in his own strength. This would be fully proved to Peter, but he didn't want to see it, or acknowledge it then. He would carry that self-confidence all the way to the point where Jesus went to the cross and he could not follow. And yet, Jesus was patiently leading him and teaching him and cleansing him. In verse 8 he says, "You shall never wash my feet!" And so the Lord Jesus directly told Peter how truly important that this act of washing his feet really was. "If I do not

wash you, you have no part with Me.” What a shock this was to Peter! What! No part at all with you, Lord, just because I won’t let you wash my feet? No part with Jesus, here, means exactly what it implies; no salvation at all. If Jesus cannot clean up your walk with Him day by day, all the days of your life after you believe in Him, He won’t clean you up at all, and you will not be a joint-heir with Jesus of eternal life! This is most shocking! Most dismaying! And so Peter, knowing that he had not understood the importance of this until Jesus told him, blurts out: “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”

How good and right is Peter’s enthusiasm at this point. He is very willing; very eager; even though he does not understand. Let me ask you this morning; are you? Are you very willing that the Lord Jesus cleanse you from all defilement of flesh and spirit. Are you willing for Him to wash your hands and your head; the sinfulness in your actions, and the sinfulness in your thoughts, day by day? This is a great part of your discipleship. Jesus speaks to this in verse 10, in His statement to Peter: “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean, but not all of you.” Have you been bathed by Christ? Have you been washed by the Spirit and cleansed by His blood? Let’s look at a few verses which will convince us that we must be bathed. Turn to John 3 with me. I would like to draw your attention to verses 4, 5, and 6. Jesus is speaking to a very religious but unsaved man named Nicodemus. And He has told Nicodemus that he must be born again to be able to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus thinks that Jesus is talking about physical birth and so he says to Him: “How can a man be born when he is old?” “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” “Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.’” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which born of the Spirit is spirit.” Now what is Jesus saying here. When He says, “unless one is born of water”, is He talking about water baptism? No, Jesus is talking about how a person is born again. This is not man’s work; being born again spiritually. It is the Spirit of God’s work to give life to a person dead in their trespasses and sins. It is the Spirit of God washing and cleansing the soul.

Water baptism is only the picture of what Christ and the Spirit do in our conversion. Turn with me over to Titus Chapter 3, verse 4. “But when the kindness of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” This is what it means to be “born of water and the Spirit”. Being born spiritually from above, the Holy Spirit comes to a fallen, helpless sinner, dead in their trespasses and sins, and He gives them new life in regenerating their soul. There is a washing and a cleansing not only of the conscience, taking away the guilt of sin, but there is also a breaking of the power of sin; a cleansing of the heart and the mind so that the thoughts and the feelings are turned to Christ, and to righteousness, and to the truth of the Bible. The whole heart of an unworthy sinner is renewed and a real death to sin takes place in the attitude of the heart. Faith is born in the heart, and hope and love as well. And justification takes place, whereby the sinner is declared righteous by God on the basis of Christ death and their faith in Him rather than themselves. It is on this basis that the person who was once called a sinner is now called clean and pure. They are really seen as saints of their God and brethren of their Lord, who died to cleanse them. They have believed in the word of the gospel; the truth of what Christ has done for them, in living a perfectly righteous life, and in His suffering as a substitute on the cross for their sins. Their soul and spirit have been bathed in this holy way, and they have been cleansed. Jesus says in John 15: 3, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

You will see this truth again if you will turn with me over to Ephesians 5, verse 25. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present

her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” The whole Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, in all generations, is set apart to His purposes to make them holy and useful to Himself. He loves them by teaching them and cleansing them “by the washing of water by the word”. The word of God being preached by the Lord Jesus in that day, and by all the preachers of it in all generations, does a work of cleansing in accordance with the working of the Spirit’s power. This is the Spirit’s washing in regeneration; a sovereign work of God. The Spirit blows where it will, and you do not understand where it comes from and where it is going to. But day by day, in the life of a disciple, this work keeps going on, in the washing of their feet. All the days of a Christian disciple’s life this work continues on until they die and go to be with their Lord. The spiritual bath of the elect person’s whole soul takes place in conversion.

This work of the Spirit in regeneration includes elect Gentiles as well as Jews. It includes all those chosen by God; whether they are cultured and refined, or barbarians. When Peter received the vision of a great sheet being lowered down from heaven, in Acts chapter 10, verse 11, and it was filled with all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things and birds of the air; he heard a voice speaking to him saying: “Rise Peter, kill and eat.” But Peter said, “Not so, Lord!” “For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” “And a voice spoke to him again the second time and said, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.” And when Peter was trying to explain these things to the council in Jerusalem who had come together to decide whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised also, Peter said in Acts 15, verse 7: “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.” “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” This is how our hearts are cleansed. We are initially purified by faith, being bathed in work of the Lord Jesus, in trusting in what He did for us by living His righteous life and dying upon the cross. And we are further purified and cleansed in an on-going sense through the work of the Spirit; Jesus washing our feet (washing our walk, spiritually) day by day.

Then, 3rd – Let us learn, while we are looking at this upper room, that it is the humble responsibility of every disciple of Christ to wash the feet of other disciples.

(Verses 12-17)

“So when Jesus had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’ “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.” “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.” “For assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” Jesus is saying, that in your mind, you should be often be going to this Upper Room of Christian discipleship and be learning to serve others; that you deliberately, as a disciple of Christ, humble yourself to “wash the disciple’s feet”, even as Jesus did. Now, I am aware that some churches have established foot washing as an ordinance, and they use Jesus’ words here to establish that practice in their church on an occasional basis. But that is not what Jesus was intending when He spoke these words here. The Apostles, never, by their example or by word or letter inculcated this practice as an ordinance in the church.

Instead, what we find, is that by their example and their words, they inculcated the humility which Jesus was teaching here; that Christians would love each other and serve each other in the most ordinary tasks; the most servant-oriented things that others in the body of believers needed help with; that they would help them with them. In closing, let us not think ourselves above our Teacher and Lord. If He was humble enough to do this, then we ought to be humble enough to do the meanest tasks that need to be done in the church, and for one another. If you

think that you are above them, then you have not yet learned Christ in the way that you should. Remember that it was in the same Upper Room, as the Passover was being eaten, that the Lord's Supper was instituted. Christ took the basin and the towel, and knelt down and washed the feet of the disciples. He did this out of His love for them. He did it very shortly before He went to the cross. "Whoever desires to come after Me," Jesus says, "let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." Let us not think ourselves above our Lord. Let us take the position that He did, and do the work of a servant.