

### The Lord Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet

#### John 13:1-11

John 13:1-11 – *"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.*

*<sup>2</sup> And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then He came to Simon Peter, and Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"*

*<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."*

*<sup>8</sup> 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."*

*<sup>9</sup> Then Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"*

*<sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."*

#### Background Notes

Chapters 13 through 17 of the Gospel of John include the events and discourses that took place in the Upper Room. Here the Lord instructed and comforted His beloved disciples before He went to the cross. Verse 1 states His purpose: *"...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."*

It's possible that the meal mentioned in verse 2 was not the Passover meal (*seder*) at which the Lord's Supper was instituted. Possibly it was an earlier meal. You will notice that the institution of the Lord's Supper was not included in the events of John 13. In fact, the institution of the Lord's Supper was not included in the Gospel of John at all! On the other hand, the Lord washing the disciples' feet was not included in Matthew, Mark, or Luke - but they recorded the institution of the Lord's Supper at the Passover meal. I believe the meal in John 13 was the Passover meal, and that is certainly the traditional interpretation.

Why did John indicate that the events of chapter 13 occurred *before* the Passover (v1)? The reason is that the Lord and His disciples ate the Passover meal a day earlier than the actual Passover day. John 18:28, which took place on the following day after the events recorded in John 13, says: *"Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover."*

So apparently the Lord and His disciples celebrated the Passover meal a day early. Why? I believe the reason was that the Lord would give His life on the very day that the Passover Lambs were sacrificed. Our Lord was the perfect Lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sin of the world, and 1 Corinthians 5:7 says, *“For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”*

Two background notes in reference to foot washing. This background information is valuable because the Lord based His teaching on the washing procedure in this event.

Unlike today, when every home here in the USA has at least one bathtub and shower, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century people went to public Roman baths to wash their bodies. But they washed parts of the body (like feet) at home between baths. People wore sandals and the roads were dusty, so their feet needed to be washed every day. It was common courtesy to wash people’s feet when they came into a home. Normally washing feet was a servant’s responsibility, so it’s very clear that our Lord was taking the role of a servant in this event.

Two different words are used for “wash” in verse 10. The first word that’s translated “wash” is better translated “bathed,” and refers to washing the entire body, as people did in the public baths of that day. The second word translated “wash” refers to washing only a part of the body – such as the feet, as in the frequent foot-washings of that day. So it’s helpful to know this background information as we look at the Lord’s teaching.

## Doctrinal / Teaching Points

### 1. The foot-washing event pictures cleansing from sin.

When the Lord began to wash Peter’s feet, Peter said, *“Lord, are You washing my feet?”* (v6). The Lord answered, *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this”* (v7). In other words, the Lord was saying, “Peter, what I am doing has a deeper meaning, and you will understand that later.”

Then *“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!’”* (v8). So we’re beginning to see that there’s a deeper meaning to the foot washing, and it has something to do with cleansing from sin.

So then, true to character, Peter blurted out, *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”* And the Lord 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”* (v10). Obviously the one who was not clean was Judas, who had already plotted to betray the Lord. *“...the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him...”* (v2).

Against the background of the Roman bath and the frequent foot washings, the Lord was teaching that there is one “entire body washing,” represented by the bath, which we need only **once** for salvation - to be saved from sin. But there is another washing, represented by the foot washing, that we need frequently. What is the meaning of these two washings?

From the clear teaching from the rest of Scripture, the two “washings” would be the “bath of salvation” and the daily “frequent cleansing from defiling sin.”

Titus 3:5 says, *“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...”* That verse refers to the bath of salvation, and that cleansing is the basis of our **relationship with God**. We are in Christ. This washing is done once and for all when a person trusts Christ as personal Savior.

But after we are saved, if we’re honest we’ll admit that we don’t live perfect lives. In our day-to-day walk in this sinful world, our “feet become dirty.” We need that daily cleansing from the defiling effects of sin in our everyday lives if we want to enjoy continual **fellowship with the Lord**. Note - not our relationship, but our fellowship!

Notice what the Lord said here. When 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.”* Frequent foot washing does not establish **relationship** - it’s about our continual **fellowship** with Jesus. 1 John 1:9 is addressed to Christians, who have already had the “bath” of salvation: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* 1 John 1:9 is talking about the “foot-washing” aspect of cleansing from day-to-day sin.

We need to continually place our feet in the Lord’s hands for daily cleansing. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).* So, compared to our permanent cleansing from sin that we receive at salvation, the deeper meaning of the foot washing is frequent cleansing from the day-to-day effects of sin. And we need it often! The foot washing, then, pictures cleansing from daily sin.

## 2. The foot-washing event pictures the path of Christ.

I’m sure you’re aware that all the actions of Christ in the Gospel record are parables in themselves. The foot-washing event is a vivid portrayal of the path of self-humiliation that our Lord took, going all the way from Heaven’s glory to suffer death on the cross for us.

Before we look at the picture, let’s read about this path in Philippians 2:5-8: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

Now let’s look at the picture in John 13.

- *“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 supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.”* Jesus laid aside His garments of glory and majesty. **But - He did not lay aside His deity!** He laid aside the outward insignia of that deity: He laid aside His glory, His majesty.

- *“He took a towel and girded Himself”* - He took the form of a servant when He became Man.

- *“He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, wiping them with a towel with which He was girded.”* He went all the way to the cross - and this makes possible His present ministry of cleansing from sin.

- *“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again...”* This pictures His present place. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. “[Jesus], *being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*” (Hebrews 13:1-3).

How wonderful the Word of God is - in every detail! The foot-washing event pictures the path of Christ.

## **Practical Application**

### **Would you wash the feet of Judas?**

Judas was present at this part of the meal. Although it appears that he departed before the institution of the Lord’s Supper, Judas was present at this point, and the Lord washed his feet!

Would you wash the feet of Judas? You might think, “Well, I might. But not if I knew he was going to betray me – and for money!” Well, the Lord *knew!* The Lord’s knowledge of all these events is emphasized in verses 1-3. And the Lord’s love is emphasized in verses 1-3 as well. The Lord washed Judas’ feet. Would we?

Have you ever been betrayed? Have you ever been betrayed by a fellow believer? If so, how would you feel about serving that fellow believer? Serving is what foot washing is all about, right? Maybe there’s a fellow-believer whom you just can’t stand because you feel they betrayed you - and maybe they actually did! Now you won’t even talk to that person, let alone wash his or her feet!

Is it possible that if you took the “servant place” as the Lord did, and began to minister to that person, that perhaps healing would begin to take place? But you might say, “They need to ask my forgiveness first!” Did the Lord wait for Judas to confess his sin? No! In fact, Judas died in his sin.

Even knowing all this, the Lord washed the feet of Judas the betrayer! So once again the question (and I direct it to myself as well): “Would you wash the feet of Judas?”