

**JESUS MINISTERS TO HIS NEW PEOPLE (PART II)**  
**"JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET"**  
(John 13:2-17)

<sup>2</sup> And supper being ended, the devil having now put 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 was come from God, and went to God; <sup>4</sup> He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. <sup>5</sup> After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel wherewith he was girded. <sup>6</sup> Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. <sup>8</sup> Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also *my* hands and *my* head. <sup>10</sup> Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash *his* feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. <sup>11</sup> For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean. <sup>12</sup> So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. <sup>17</sup> If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

John 13:2-17

Jesus has now hid himself from the Jewish multitude. (John 12:36) He has finished his public ministry to the Jews and he is hiding from them. And he now turns his attention on the disciples on this the last night of his earthly life. Our text this morning concerns itself with what we call the last supper. This is the last supper that Jesus will eat. This is the last supper that Jesus will eat with his disciples. After this supper Jesus will get up with his disciples and walk to the Garden of Gethsemane and await his betrayal and his arrest.

The events of this last supper are recorded in all four gospels. And to get a full account of this last supper, it would be necessary to read all of them and to piece them together. In reading the four gospels, it seems that there were two major events that were undertaken during this supper. One was the institution of the Lord's Table. And on this last night with his disciples, Jesus instituted this ordinance which was to be done periodically by the church in order to remember his death. Matthew, Mark and Luke record how Jesus gave his disciples the bread and the wine and told them, "This do in remembrance of me."

But there was another act that was undertaken on this night. And that act is recorded only in the gospel of John. It is when Jesus got up from supper, put on the towel of a servant, got down on his knees and washed the dirty feet of the disciples.

This was a most extraordinary thing that Jesus did. The job of washing feet was the job of a slave. In fact, if there was a Gentile slave around, he would get the job of washing feet. And if a Gentile slave wasn't around, then the lowest man on the totem pole would get the job. Usually the job would fall on a woman servant since women were the lowest ranking class in that culture.

But when we come to our text this morning, we find that Jesus and his disciples are reclining around the supper table. This is the annual Passover supper in which every Jew was to partake of the Passover lamb.

Now in verse two in our King James translation, it says, "and supper being ended." However in the original language, there is nothing in the wording that would suggest an end to the supper. It is only two words in the Greek – deipnon ginomai. It might be literally translated "supper being." So it appears that Jesus and the twelve disciples were reclining around the supper table. They were in the process of eating supper. And then something very extraordinary happened.

*He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments: and took a towel, and girded himself. After that, he poureth water in a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

John 13:4, 5

You will notice first of all that Jesus got up from the table. Everyone else was still reclining around the table and Jesus got up. Now they all must have wondered what Jesus was about to do because by now they were quite used to following him without question. If he got up and walked to another city, they would follow him. If he got up to go somewhere, they would follow him.

But this time, Jesus got up and it says he "laid aside his garments." Now the Jews commonly wore layers of garments. There was an inner garment or an inner robe and there was an outer robe. And Jesus apparently took off his outer garment. The outer garment tended to get in the way if you were engaging in some physical work. So Jesus took off that outer robe to free up his arms and hands and to allow him to move about freely.

Now after he removed the outer garment, Jesus found a towel and he fastened the towel around his waist. This was what a slave would do when he was serving. He would put on a towel so that he could wipe up messes and do his cleaning.

**Example: When you go to a restaurant, sometimes the waiter will have a towel tucked into his belt and he has this towel so that he will be ready to clean up spills and messes.**

And Jesus put a towel around his waist. This was probably a large towel that would hang down to give Jesus something to wipe the feet of the disciples.

Now the disciples watched Jesus as he girded himself with this drying towel and they must have wondered what in the world he was doing. And then Jesus poured water into a wash basin and he began to wash the feet of the disciples.

Now presumably the disciples were still reclining around a short supper table. This is the way they did it. The table may have been about a foot off the ground and the disciples would lean on one elbow with their feet extended out from the table.

So, Jesus began to wash their feet. Now in order to reach their feet, undoubtedly Jesus knelt down on his knees and he would take one foot in his hand and he would either use his towel or a rag and he would dip the rag in the water and wash the foot. Once the foot was washed, then Jesus would dry it with his towel – first one foot and then the other. And he went from one disciple to the other.

Now when Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter objected and he said,

*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*

John 13:6

Jesus told Peter, “You don’t know what I’m doing right now but you will know later.” Then Peter said, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

You see how repulsive this was to Peter. This was unthinkable that the master should wash the servant’s feet. And it was certainly unthinkable that Jesus should wash his feet. And Peter said, “No way. You will never wash my feet.”

Jesus told Peter, “If I don’t wash your feet then you have no part with me.”

Once Jesus told Peter this, old impetuous Peter said, “Well then, wash my hands and my head also. But Jesus told Peter, you are already washed. You have already had a bath before you came to supper Peter. But your feet got dirty when you walked the dusty roads. So, all I need to do now is wash your feet.

Now notice in verse ten that Jesus told the disciples, “You are clean, but not all of you are clean.” And of course, Jesus was speaking of Judas who was not spiritually clean at all. But the other eleven disciples were clean.

After Jesus finished washing the disciples’ feet, he put his garments back on and he sat down again at the table and he continued to teach them on up into the night.

From this account of the washing of the disciples’ feet, I think we should learn several things. First, we see

## The Humility of Jesus Christ

You really can't grasp the significance of this act of Jesus unless you first grasp who this man Jesus was. Of course, the first twelve chapters of John have been all about the deity of Jesus. John has told us that this man Jesus is the one who existed in the beginning of all things. He was with God before the world was created. And he was God. He is the one who created the universe. All of that is stated in the first chapter. And then, in each chapter, by his words and by his works, Jesus is identified as very God. He is equal with the Father. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."

But if we confine ourselves to our text, we see that Jesus knew something about himself before he ever stooped to wash the disciples' feet. Look at verse three.

*Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God.*

John 13:3

Before Jesus ever got down on his knees and took dirty feet in his hands, he knew who he was. He was the one who had all authority in the universe. God the Father had given all things into his hands. This man Jesus was the greatest of the great. And the Father handed over the universe to him. Ephesians puts it this way, "All things are put under his feet." Jesus has been given a name that is above all other names. He has been given a position above all others. He occupies a position above all principalities and powers. He has authority over all angels and all devils. And he has authority over all human beings. He will be worshipped forever as the greatest of the great. Every creature will one day fall down and acknowledge his greatness. And all of this verse three says Jesus knew.

But Jesus knew something else in verse three. He knew that he had come from God and was going to God. Jesus occupied an exalted place in heaven before he ever became a man. He was eternal in the heavens. He was with God from all eternity and it says, "He came from God." Ah, and he was on his way back there. Nothing could hold him. Nothing could prevent him. And before Jesus stooped down and pickup up Peter's nasty feet, he knew all of this.

And this teaches us even more about our great Savior. When we think of the great attributes of Jesus Christ, we often think of his omniscience (that he knows all things) or his omnipotence (that he can do all things) or his unrelenting sense of justice or his impeccable righteousness or his great love and mercy and grace. We could go on and on describing the divine attributes of Jesus. But when you consider the great attributes of your Savior, I hope you will not forget the one that is revealed in our text, and that is the astonishing attribute of divine humility.

Is it possible that God himself could be humble? And the answer is a resounding, "Yes." Jesus Christ was humble. He was the greatest man who ever lived and at the same time the most humble. And knowing that he was the God of all creatures, knowing that he was the greatest of all time, knowing that he created all things, knowing that all authority had been given to him, he got down on his knees and washed their feet.

You see, humility does not imply a lack of greatness. Humility is not weakness. But humility is one of the most extraordinary attributes of God himself. All of the attributes of God are extraordinary, but perhaps his humility is the most astonishing of all.

I want you to take note that Judas was still among them. Judas was not dismissed from the group until verse 30. And it appears that when Jesus came around to Judas that he likewise got down on his knees and washed his feet. The devil had already cast the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas and Jesus knew. (John 13:2) And yet, Jesus washed the dirty feet of Judas Iscariot. And so, we see the great humility of Jesus in this simple act of washing feet.

But also, in this act of foot washing, we see

### The Imminent Death of Jesus Prefigured

Obviously, the washing of feet is a simple act. Anyone can do it. It probably took Jesus only a few minutes to do it. But in this simple act, given the immediate context, it was an act that prefigured a much greater act of humility which Jesus would perform in a few hours. The next morning Jesus would perform the greatest act of humility ever known to man. He would do much more than wash the disciples' feet. He would voluntarily die for them on a cross. And I hope you see in this ritual of foot-washing the greater picture.

I want you to see the parallel between our text for this morning and Philippians chapter two. In our text, Jesus laid aside his garments. In Philippians he laid aside his reputation. (Philippians 2:7) He laid aside his divine garments, so to speak. In our text, Jesus put on a towel which was the garment of a slave. In Philippians he took upon himself the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:7) In our text, Jesus performed a lowly act, he washed feet. In Philippians he performed a lowly act, he died. And I suggest to you that when Jesus got down on his knees to wash their feet, he was indicating to them that on the morrow he would climb up on a cross and die for them.

So, in the washing of the disciples' feet we see the great humility of the Savior and we see his death prefigured. But next in the foot washing we see

### The Example Set by Jesus

This act of foot-washing was not merely a type of his ultimate humility on the cross, but Jesus intended for it to serve as an example for his disciples. Look what he told them:

*For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

John 13:15

In these last acts here toward his disciples, Jesus was teaching them a great lesson of the Christian life and that is that Christians should conduct themselves with great humility toward one another. The lesson here is drawn from the greater to the lessor. If their Master is willing to wash their feet, then they should certainly be willing to wash one another's feet.

*Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.*

John 13:13, 14

One of the most beautiful qualities of a Christian is humility. To be humble is to be like Christ. Our duty as a Christian is to lay aside our garments of pride and self-service and to wrap ourselves in the towel of humility and to attend to the needs of others. This is what Jesus taught the disciples and this is what he taught each of us by washing feet.

There is a washing that is once for all and a washing that is repeated over and over.

I want you to notice that Jesus compared the washing of feet to the washing of the soul. He told the disciples that they were clean, but then he clarified that they were not all clean. (John 13:10) Now when he said that they were not all clean he was referring to Judas. Now he didn't mean that Judas forgot to take a bath that day. But he meant that Judas was not washed spiritually. So it is clear that this act of foot washing was a physical act which had a spiritual significance.

It appears that there are two kinds of washings that are necessary for a sinner to be cleansed from his sins. There is a once-for-all washing and then there is a continual washing. You will notice that Jesus considered the eleven disciples to be clean overall.

*Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.*

John 13:10

There is a washing that Jesus does for his sheep in regeneration.

*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*

Regeneration is that act of God whereby he cleanses you "every whit." He makes you acceptable to a holy God by this washing. He washes you head to toe and you are spotless before the Father.

But as you travel down the dirty roads of this world there is need that you be cleansed on a daily basis. And the Scriptures say that if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father. In effect, Jesus continually washes our spiritual feet and he keeps us clean.

What a magnificent salvation we have in Christ. What a magnificent Savior we have in Christ who cleanses us completely and who cleanses us continually.

I want you to see once again from our text that,

A ritual will never save you.

The washing of feet is nothing but a ritual. It is a physical act that has no efficacy whatsoever. It will clean the dirt off of your feet but it will not save your soul. It is only a picture of the saving work of Christ.

Jesus washed the feet of all twelve disciples, but the washing of the feet of Judas had no effect upon him. It did not save him. It did not impart any grace to him whatsoever. It didn't soften his heart. It simply cleaned his feet.

And I would remind you once again that there is no ritual on the face of the earth that will make you right with God. There is no prayer you can utter. There are no words you can say. There are no incantations. There are no religious acts that will save you. The work of salvation is already done. Jesus stretched his arms out and paid the penalty for sin and this is the work of salvation. The only thing that you can do is to receive the free gift by faith.

*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*

That is, you will be cleansed from your sins "every whit," as Jesus said. And Jesus will keep you and cleanse your spiritual feet day by day until he presents you faultless before the Father one day.

I pray that each of you are cleansed every whit by the blood of Christ.