

Lessons From The Upper Room

John 13:1-17

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Follow with me as I read this beautiful story in John 13:1-17.

John tells us, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come...”—Notice that. Jesus knew that it was time for Him to go to the Cross as the Passover Lamb to die for the sins of the world—“...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...”—again—“...that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God...”—This is what He did—“...rose from 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.”

“Then He came to Simon Peter...”—and any time He comes to Simon Peter, you know something’s going to happen—“...And Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’ Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’...”—In the Greek it’s very strong. It’s a double negative: ‘No, You’ll never wash my feet!’—“...Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part...’—or “fellowship”—“...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.’ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean.’”

“So when He 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. Most 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...”—or “happy”—“...are you if you do them.”

The scene of this moving narrative is the upper room. In the Gospels there are basically four places where we find Jesus giving these in-depth discourses. The first one is what we call the Sermon on the Mount. The second one is what’s called the kingdom parables, recorded in Mark 13 and in Luke 21. We see Jesus discoursing and disclosing on the things of the kingdom of God. The third one would be the Olivet discourse, a famous prophetic teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24 and 25 as well as in Luke 21. The fourth discourse is the one we read now in John 13 to 16 where Jesus in 17, in this upper room setting, is giving them teaching before He is crucified.

What is happening here in John 13, as well as all the way to 17, is the night before Jesus is to be crucified. Jesus is going to leave this upper room. It's Thursday night. He's going to go into the Garden of Gethsemane in the early hours of the morning. He will be arrested. Then He will be tried by the Jews and the Romans. Then He will be crucified on the Cross, and He will die by Friday afternoon and be buried. We know what happens three days later; Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

Notice in John 13:1 that Jesus knows "that His hour had come." All through the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "My hour has not yet come," but now Jesus knows that as the Passover Lamb fulfilling that which the lamb typifies in the Old Testament—when they slew the lamb and they took the blood and applied it to their homes and went out in the Exodus—so Jesus is our Passover Lamb, a sacrifice for us to set us free. Not from the bondage of Egypt but from the bondage of sin, that we might be free to walk into the Promised Land of the abundant Christian life.

Verse 2, "And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing..."—Notice it says that Jesus knew His hour had come—"...that the Father had given all things into His hands..." That means that Jesus knew the Father had given Him all authority.

Now if you had all power and all authority given to you, what would you do with that power and authority? Jesus actually "rose from 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."

There are three lessons from this narrative I want to share with you. These lessons were not only for the disciples but for us also. The first lesson is that Jesus was teaching them about Himself. These are the lessons He was trying to convey to His disciples in that upper room. Notice what He gives to us in verses 4-5. I believe Jesus' actions are a deliberate parable of His mission: who He was, where He came from, why He was here and where He would go.

In those days, every home had, at the door on the inside, a basin to pour water into, a pitcher of water and a towel. They didn't have asphalt or concrete, and they didn't have closed-toe shoes. They had open sandals. Wherever they walked, their feet would become dusty and dirty. So it was customary that when you arrived at someone's house, they wouldn't say, "Come in. Can I take your coat? Have something to drink. Sit down and make yourself at home." No. When they entered the house, the first thing that would happen is that the lowest of the servants, or the lowest of the slaves, would have the guest sit down, the slave would pour water in the basin, put water on the feet and wash them and then wipe them with the towel.

You know that when you've been camping and been to the shower and you're going back to your tent or your camper with your sandals on that sometimes your feet get dirty. You have to protect your feet before you go into the camping tent. So it was kind of a primitive setting like that in which their feet would get dirty wherever they went. They had a bath and they're clean,

but their feet are dusty and dirty, so they would need to wash them.

So they are in this borrowed room. I emphasize “borrowed,” because Jesus never owned a house. Jesus didn’t say, “Come to My house,” because He didn’t have a house. They asked Jesus one time where He stayed, and He pointed to a tree and said, “See that tree? I sleep under a tree. That’s where I sleep.” Literally that’s what He did; He crashed under a tree in the Garden of Gethsemane. He never owned a house.

He had to borrow a donkey on Palm Sunday to ride into Jerusalem. When He was buried, they had to borrow a grave to put Him in, but He only needed it for the weekend. “Can I borrow your sepulcher? I only need it for three days and three nights. I’ll be outta there.”

Now Jesus is in this borrowed upper room. Why? Because it was Passover, verse 1. This is the Passover meal, and Jesus would institute what we call The Lord’s Supper. In this dinner, this family meal, that they are going to celebrate, the bread is symbolizing His body, and the cup is symbolizing the New Covenant of His blood, shed for us. He would institute that meal.

Judas has now left the room, and Jesus rises from the supper table. He laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded it tight around His waist. That was the badge of the lowest servant. He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that He was girded with. Wow! What a picture.

What a picture of God coming down from heaven to earth, becoming a man, serving and washing their feet. I can imagine that the disciples—as we’ll see when He comes to Peter—were humbled by this. “Oh, no. I can’t believe Jesus is going to wash our feet!” Jesus washes each one of their feet.

Now this is a picture of who He really is, where He came from, why He came and where He would go. The best commentary on verses 4-5 are found in Philippians 2. Theologians call it the “kenosis passage.” It is taken from the Greek word that says in the English Bible, “He emptied Himself.” What that passage tells us is that the same attitude that was found in Christ Jesus should be found in us. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” And here it is: “Who, being in the form...”—“morphe”—“...of God...”—that means that in essence Jesus was God. He was divine—“...thought it not robbery to be equal with God...”—not something to hold onto. And here’s our word kenosis—“...but made Himself of no reputation...”—or “He emptied Himself”—“...and took upon Him the form of a servant...”—that means He took on humanity—“...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.” Paul said, therefore, that “God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Now when you parallel this story in John 13 with Philippians 2, the great kenosis passage—go back with me to John 13:4. He “rose from supper and laid aside His garments.” You know what that’s a picture of? It’s a picture of Jesus getting off the throne in heaven, and through the

womb of the Virgin Mary, taking on humanity. He “laid aside His garments.” He rose from the throne—and here’s a very important point—“He emptied Himself” or “He laid aside His garments.” In the story, He took off His outer tunic, His outer coat. He would have been in, what they called in their days, His underwear. He had a coat over His undergarment, the linen garment. And He laid that outer coat aside.

So when Jesus came to earth from heaven, He laid something aside temporarily. What is it that Jesus emptied Himself of? It’s a very important point. He did not empty Himself of His deity. Impossible. There’s no way that God can stop being God, because God is immutable; He doesn’t change. There are some people who believe that we can someday become gods, but that’s impossible. There is only one God who became a man, and that’s Jesus Christ. So what Jesus laid aside was the glory, the splendor, the majesty of His deity. He didn’t lay aside His divine nature; He laid aside the glory and the splendor of His divine nature. He clothed Himself in humanity through the womb of the Virgin Mary. When Jesus got up from supper and took that towel, verse 4, and He “girded” Himself, that’s a picture of taking on humanity.

So He rose from supper, laid aside His glory—took off His tunic—took a towel and tied it around His waist. That was the badge of a servant. That’s a picture of His humanity. Jesus, as God in heaven, laying aside His glory, came down to earth and took on full humanity. Jesus Christ was the God-man; fully God and fully man in one person.

Here’s something few people think about: in His humanity, Jesus looked like any other human being. Jesus didn’t glow in the dark. Jesus didn’t actually have a halo. If that were the case, when they went to arrest Him in the Garden, Judas could have said, “I don’t need to kiss Him. Just look for the guy who’s glowing. The guy with the halo. Just look for the guy who has reverb in His voice. ‘I am the way-way-way.’” No. Jesus looked like any other Galilean peasant or carpenter from Nazareth. He was fully man but without sin. He was every bit as human as we are but without our sinful nature. So He was God and man, but He came down from heaven and divested Himself temporarily even of the use of His divine attributes. Jesus was hungry. Jesus was thirsty. Jesus was tired.

Have you ever been hungry, thirsty and tired? Sure. God understands. You ever been misunderstood? God understands. You ever been rejected by your friends? Jesus understands. He became the sympathetic and compassionate high priest. Have you ever suffered physically? God understands. It would be hard to believe in a God of love in a world of sorrow and suffering if it weren’t for the incarnation of Jesus Christ; to realize that God actually left His throne and came down, was born as a baby, had to depend on His parents, had to grow and went through all the things that we go through. He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin.

Jesus understands your broken heart. Jesus understands your sorrows and your pain and your fears. When Jesus stood at the grave of Lazarus, the Bible says that “Jesus wept.” It’s the shortest verse in the Bible, but it says so much. He is a God who cares. He is a God of compassion. He is a God who understands your sorrows and your deepest pains.

Any time I take communion and I hold the bread in my hand and I drink the cup, I remember that God became a man for me. God came from heaven and became a man so that He could suffer and die. That bread is broken, because it is a symbol of His body broken for you. The cup represents the blood that was shed for you.

Why did Jesus come from heaven, lay aside His glory, take on the limitations of humanity? So that He could die on the Cross and wash us and forgive us of our sins, so that we could have the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. And to think that when I was born again I was given a bath; Jesus washed me of all my sins. So we know who Jesus is, we know why He came and we know where He is going. In verses 1-5, Jesus is trying to teach them a lesson about His purpose and His person and why He came.

Secondly, Jesus was teaching them about His salvation. In verse 6, Jesus came to Simon Peter. I love this part of the story. "And Peter said to Him, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?'" My sanctified-imagination paraphrase of this conversation is that Peter said, "No way! You think You're going to wash my feet?!" Jesus said to Peter, "What I'm doing, you don't know, but you'll know later on." Then Peter, still not getting it said, "No! You will never, never wash my feet!" He said this very powerfully in a double negative: "No, never shall You wash my feet!" Then Jesus answered, and here's the lesson: "If I do not wash you, you have no part..."—or "fellowship" or "koinonia" or "partnership"—"...with Me."

When Peter heard that, he went to the other extreme. He went from "No, you're not going to wash my feet" to "Give me a whole bath!" He said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head! That sounds awesome, Lord. That means communion with You, so give it to me, Lord! Give me a whole bath!" Paraphrasing, Jesus said, "Cool your jets, Peter. Calm down, dude." Jesus said, "He who is washed..." Jesus used a very interesting Greek word for "washed." It means "bathed." It is a word that would be used for an entire bath. Jesus said, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet..."—and this would be a quick-wipe washing of the feet. If you had a bath, and you traveled from the bath house to the main house and only your feet had become dirty, that's all you need is your feet washed—"...but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." Jesus knew that Judas was there and that Judas was going to betray Him. That's why Jesus said, "You are clean, but not all of you."

The best commentary on this lesson is 1 John 1:9. As a Christian, you should know this verse. It says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to clean us from all unrighteousness." That's good news. That's what communion is a reminder of; that He is washing our feet as we're reminded of things like "Forgive me, Lord. I spoke harshly to my wife. Forgive me, Lord. I had that sinful thought" or "Forgive me for my selfish attitude of late. Lord, please cleanse me." The moment you confess, He washes your feet.

There is a very, very important, doctrinal, theological point that I want to make. When Jesus said, "He who is bathed..." I believe it represents our initial salvation. Theologians use the term "regeneration" and that you were "justified" or that God declared you righteous. We use the term that you were "born again." The moment you were born again, God gave you a bath; He

cleaned you all up.

The problem is, though, as we walk with the Lord, our feet get dirty. We don't lose our salvation, but we do get soiled. Don't forget that. Satan comes along and says, "You're not a Christian; you had that thought," or "You're not a Christian; you said that word" or "You're not a Christian; you're thinking that way. You've lost your salvation." The idea is that some people think that they have to get born again, again. I don't believe that you can get born again, again. If you had a bath, all you need—and believe me, you need it. Some of you have stinky feet right now, spiritually speaking. All you need is your feet washed. And guess how often we need our feet washed? All day, every day, all through the day.

On the way to work, if you drive on the freeway, in southern California you need your feet washed. A little boy asked, "Mommy, why is it that when Daddy drives, all the idiots come out?" They're never out on the highway when Mom drives; only when Dad drives. Say, "Lord, forgive me."

Maybe it's the thought or the attitude or the way you treated your wife or husband. Or the way you spoke to your children. I can't tell you how many times I went into my kid's bedroom and said, "Listen, I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Dad is wrong and I shouldn't have spoken that way. I love you. Please forgive me. I've asked Jesus to forgive me. Will you forgive me?" You know how kids are; they smile and say, "I forgive you, Daddy," and they give you a hug and a kiss. It's so amazing.

But we need to come to God as little children and say, "God, I've sinned. I need my feet washed. God, please forgive me." You're not being bathed all over; you're just getting your feet washed, so that you can have fellowship or communion with God again. Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." So you're not in the sunshine of God's love.

Do you wonder now why you don't sense His presence? You don't have His peace? Or your heart is troubled? Or it seems that God is so distant and far away? Communion is an awesome time to say, "Lord, search me and know me and try me and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way of everlasting. Lord, forgive me." Some of us know that there are things that we did this week that were wrong. Have you asked God to forgive you? Have you asked God to cleanse you and to wash your feet? Have you been restored and have a part or a fellowship with Him? There is a lesson about salvation that having been bathed, we need now only to confess our sins, and He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

There is a third lesson Jesus wanted His disciples to learn. Jesus was teaching them about His will. He was teaching them about His person. He was teaching them about His pardon; He wants to forgive us. Then, thirdly, He was teaching them about His purpose; how they were called to be humble servants. The background for this is verses 12-17. It says, "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again..."—By the way, after Jesus died and was resurrected, He ascended back into heaven. Now He is the exalted God-man at

the right hand of the Father and once again has taken His seat in heaven—"...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...'—and here's the point—"...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. Most 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...."—Then Jesus drives home this point—"...If you know these things, blessed..."—or "happy"—"...are you if you do them." Jesus is telling us how to be happy.

And here's the point: Jesus has called us to follow His example. You say, "You mean we have to literally get down and wash each other's feet?" No. I don't believe that Jesus is instituting a foot-washing ceremony here. Some churches do that, and if you want to do that, it's fine. There's nothing wrong with that. But it's perfectly possible that you could go through the ceremony of washing somebody's feet and not have a servant's heart.

I believe what Jesus is trying to convey is that if you want to follow Him, then you're going to have to be humble, and you're going to have to serve other people. I believe this is the essence of what a Christian is. A Christian is a humble servant to others. You humble yourself. You put aside your goals, plans and ambition. Yes, you heard me right. If you are a Christian, you are not your own; you've been "bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body...which belongs to Him." You were redeemed; you're not your own. It's not your own choice to go where you want to go and do what you want to do and live how you want to live.

That's what we hear in our culture today. "You can be anything you want to be. You can do anything you want to do. You just have to dream big, and it's all about you and your goals and your aspirations." I understand that, and it's great to be ambitious. But the Bible says that "He who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God must be the servant of all."

How can we take communion, the symbol of His broken body and His shed blood, and live selfishly? How can we take communion, go out of here and not serve our husband or our wife or serve our children or serve our family or serve our coworkers or serve our neighbors or serve our brothers and sisters in Christ? Since Jesus left heaven and came down to earth for us, suffered and died, how can we then live selfishly?

There are a lot of people whose marriage ends in divorce because, basically, selfishness creeps into their hearts. All they think about is themselves, their own comfort, what's good for them. They don't say, "Lord, help me to die to myself. Help me to pick up my cross. Help me to love that person. Help me to give to that person. Help me to sacrifice myself for that person."

You go, "If I do that, they'll just walk all over me." They walked all over Jesus. He said, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." How do we wash other's feet? By serving them, praying for them, forgiving them, loving them, encouraging them, helping them. Doing all we can for them: "How can I serve you? How can I encourage you? How can I strengthen you in your walk with the Lord?" Instead of being all self-

absorbed and self-focused.

This story is the lesson that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are to be marked by a towel, on your knees serving others. That's who a Christian is. A Christian is one who has put aside his goals, his ambitions, his desires and says, "Lord, I'll go where you want me to go. I'll do what you want me to do. I'll be what you want me to be. I'll say what you want me to say. Have your way in my life." When you humble yourself like that, God will exalt you. You'll be happy. God will use you for His glory. The way up is down; Jesus said, "He who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God must be the servant of all."

So there is a lesson about His person: He came from heaven, took on humanity to die for our sins. There's a lesson about His pardon: If you've been born again and you sin, confess your sin and "God is faithful and just to forgive your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

As we celebrate communion, if there is some unconfessed sin in your life, there is no reason for anyone not to have your feet washed spiritually. You can have a happy heart, because holiness leads to happiness.

Jesus gave us a lesson about His will. God's will for you and God's will for me and God's will for us is that we be humble servants to others. It's that simple. You say, "Well, I don't like that." That's not my problem.

You want to be happy? Put it into practice. You want to be miserable? Live for yourself, think about yourself, worship yourself, be unto yourself, go home and spend the afternoon looking in the mirror. That'll send you into depression. You want to be happy? Then let's forget about ourselves. Let's worship Jesus and serve others.