

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN13A_Jesus Washes the Disciples Feet)

Introduction

We have just completed a review of the second major division of John's Gospel (1:19-12:50) – Jesus' presentation of Himself as the Son of God.¹ Throughout this section we saw the opposition to Jesus intensify to the point that Jesus' opposition was ready to kill Him and persecute His followers (10:31; 11:53; 12:10-11) – a fact made most evident by His followers fear of the religious leaders and their hesitancy to acknowledge Jesus publicly (12:42-43). All of this narrative to date has brought us to the last few days of Jesus' life leading up to His crucifixion.

In this third major division of John's Gospel, Jesus takes a brief retreat with His disciples so that He may offer them final instruction. There are three parts to this retreat recorded in 13:1-17:26:

- ❑ The God/Man/King washes the disciples' feet (13:1-30)
- ❑ The Lord talks with the remaining eleven concerning His departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit (13:31-16:33)
- ❑ The Lord's prayer for His own (17:1-26)

The Setting (13:1-3)

We have studied this verse on prior occasions in this series as we examined our Lord's last week on earth in the Synoptic gospel accounts and in Easter specials.² When John indicates that it was "before the Feast of the Passover," (Jn 13:1) then this was probably the evening prior to Jesus' crucifixion. John 19:14 (cf. Jn 18:28) indicates that Jesus was crucified on the preparation for the Passover.

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. (Jn 18:28)

Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour [*6 am per Jewish reckoning*]. And he [*Pilate*] said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" (Jn 19:14)

The Passover Feast was eaten during the evening of the Day of Preparation, therefore Jesus would have been crucified prior to the Passover Feast. This is consistent with Jesus' statements recorded in Luke.

Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'" (Lk 22:15-18)

¹ The 1st division of John's Gospel was the Prologue (1:1-18); the 2nd division (1:19-12:50) focuses upon Jesus' presentation as the Son of God; and the 3rd division (13:1-17:26) is set within the context of Jesus' retreat with His disciples as He prepares them for His death and departure. The 4th division (18:1-21:25) of John's Gospel deals with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

² For example, see the lesson titled 'SB_LK22B_Jesus' Last Week' in our Survey of the Bible series – Luke.

Comment: "The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him" – after Jesus indicates that He gives eternal life and that no one is able to snatch His own out of His hand.

Comment: "So from that day on they planned together to kill Him" – after Jesus raised Lazarus and the religious leaders had consulted with Caiaphas.

Comment: "Nevertheless, many of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God."

The Day of Preparation evidently related to a practice that had become common in Israel during or prior to Jesus' day. The practice is still common among orthodox Jews today. The threat of being cut off from Israel was taken so seriously that it was universal practice to put away leaven a whole day before the prescribed period. This would increase the possibility that there would be no overlooked portion of yeast that had not been put away. According to the Jewish means of reckoning a day, the evening that the Passover Feast was eaten was the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that lasted for seven days.³

Therefore, the occasion that serves as the setting for the events of chapter 13 of John's Gospel is most likely what is commonly referred to as The Last Supper. Jesus celebrated an abbreviated meal with His disciples that consisted of bread and wine. He used this meal to represent His unique Person and Work. The bread (Lk 22:19) represented His body, i.e. His unique nature as the God/man Who was uniquely qualified to be the acceptable sacrifice and satisfy God the Father's righteousness. The wine (Lk 22:20) represented the basis of the fulfillment of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) to Israel – a spiritual phenomena that was still a potential during the lifetimes of Jesus' disciples, but which would not be realized due to Israel's subsequent rejection of the crucified Jesus as their Messiah (see Acts 2:29-39 and 3:19-21).

These first three verses of John 13 are very simple in construction and verbiage; however, they disclose important insight into Jesus' self-consciousness. In these verses, we see that Jesus' awareness of His mission and purpose as the Son of God motivated Him to love His own in an unconditional manner. Jesus was the creator of everything in the universe (Jn 1:2-3 cf. Col 1:16-17), yet He knew that in order for man to have the potential for eternal life with the Father, He would have to suffer through the greatest act of humility in the universe, i.e. an agonizing death on a Cross as our substitute.

He was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (Jn 1:2-3)

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. (Jn 1:16-17)

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. (Phil 2:5-8)

As the supreme example of leadership as the King of a different kingdom, the foundation of which is based upon different principles of power than man or angels had ever seen, Jesus humbled Himself as a servant to wash His disciples' feet. The cosmic kingdoms are based upon a principles and a system of power that at its root glorifies man or Satan depending upon the manner in which it is examined. God's kingdom is based upon principles and a system of power that minimizes selfish interests in deference to the interests of others and of Christ. These are two diametrically opposed systems.

³ "We note that the entire Passover season was referred to as 'the feast of Unleavened Bread.' Thus 'Unleavened Bread' referred to the Passover as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed for seven days (cf. Lev. 23:4-8). It seems that since the days of the Dispersion, the Jews had added an extra day at the beginning of the eight days of this festival season and called it the Day of Preparation." J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 415.

Principle: A true leader sees him/herself as a servant of those whom he/she leads.

Application: Have you observed leaders who are gifted with intellect, executive ability, or talent who believe that they are too important to perform some menial task lest it degrade them?

Application: Have you observed leaders who have performed some menial task in the interest of setting a spiritual example and in the interest of being like Christ?

Application: Have you observed leaders who have been perceived as weak by others for performing some menial task? (In this case, the leader, even though a spiritual man or woman, is being rejected by the reversionistic and cosmic influenced mindset of the masses who have rejected Christ and/or His principles in favor of cosmic thought).

Principle: Even the best leader cannot lead where others will not follow.

Application: Are you rejecting the legitimate leadership of anyone who is in a relationship of authority to you? Wives – your husbands? Your boss? If so, you may be missing out on God's intended blessing to you here in time, not to mention eternity.

Another observation from verse 2 – Jesus knew that Judas was a thief and that Judas would betray Him. Jesus had known this for some time. He knew about Judas' hypocrisy in pretending to be interested in feeding the poor while he was actually robbing them (12:4-6). As the perfect example to us of patience, Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus included Judas in those whose feet he washed. Jesus continued to afford Judas the opportunity to repent before it was too late.

Jesus Acts as a Servant (13:4-17)

In verses 4 & 5, we see Jesus laying aside His garments and "gird" Himself with a towel that He also used to wipe the disciples' feet. Imagine the setting – the disciples had gathered in secrecy to eat in the upstairs room of a private house because of the extreme opposition to Jesus. Normally, a servant was present to remove the sandals of guests and to wash the guests' feet from the dirt of the street. However, there was no slave to perform this menial task. In addition, we know from other Gospel writer's accounts that the disciples were still influenced by the cosmic system of thought and principles. They were more concerned with who was the greatest (Lk 22:24). It did not occur to them how beneficial this menial task would have been to the others and the group as a whole. Everyone just reclined at the table with their unwashed, stinky feet. As Jesus girded the towel about His waist, He must have looked like a slave to the disciples.

Principle: Academic knowledge of the Word without application is a blessing to no one.

Application: Are you too occupied with appearances to do the spiritual work of a servant? Are you missing out on the blessings God has in store for you as you apply the academic knowledge you have of Christ's example to your everyday life situations – in your marriage, at work, with other Christians, in the church, etc?

When Jesus comes to Peter, Peter's rationale for rejecting Jesus' washing seemed legitimate on the surface. However, Peter's logic was masked in a veil of pseudo-humility that existed as a result of the cosmic-influenced thought that was still present in his soul as an immature believer. His was a "pseudo-humility" because he understood and accepted Jesus' position and role as Israel's Messiah/King, but not as the humble servant He came to be in His 1st Advent. He was suffering from the cosmic system's arrogance of ignorance and his arrogance caused him to not trust Jesus' actions and behavior.

Principle: Even the believer in Jesus Christ can possess cosmic thought hangover from either his life prior to becoming a believer or as a believer who does not have the pertinent doctrines and principles from the Word in His soul.

Application: Do you have any cosmic system based principles and standards (i.e. norms and standards of the soul's conscience) that continue to influence your thinking and behavior? Examples: What are your attitudes toward legitimate authorities in your life? Toward the church? Toward society? Toward injustices suffered – perceived and real? Toward your mate? Toward Jesus and the biblical mandates for Christians of the Church Age found in Scripture?

Peter's arrogance of ignorance reminds us of the arrogance spoken of by John in his epistle which is found in those who are too arrogant and who lack humility so as to conclude that they have no sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn 1:8-9)

As was so typical of Peter, once the truth broke through his hard head, he submitted completely with every fiber of his being – even if did so in a bumbling way. (Remember the walking on the water incident). Peter responds to Jesus that Jesus shouldn't just wash his feet, but his whole body. In turn, Jesus uses the incident to teach an extremely important principle of fellowship verses relationship in addition to the principle of service to others.

Relationship – believers have a relationship (a part of) with Christ as a result of accepting Him. They are in the same family. Believers are judicially righteous in God's sight, even if not so experientially.

Fellowship – only experientially righteous believers who claim God's promises are in a position to experience fellowship with the Father through the Son. They are still in the same family, but they do not enjoy fellowship with the Father.

Jesus choice of words emphasizes these principles. In verse 10, Jesus uses the following Greek words and syntax to illustrate the principle.

- "Bathed" – perfect, passive, participle of (louo). The perfect tense denotes a completed action and the verb form from which the participle is derived refers to a completed washing.⁴ The perfect tense is strong evidence for the eternal security of the believer in spite of post-salvation sins.
- "Wash" – aorist, middle, infinitive of (nipto). The aorist tense is punctiliar action which emphasizes the individual points in time that washing is needed. The meaning of the word is to wash portions of the body verses the whole body.⁵
- The concept of the eternal security of the believer in spite of post-salvation sin is also noted in such passages as Hebrews 10:10, 14 cf. Romans 3:25-26.
- One of the common distortions of verse 10 is the interpretation offered by Roman Catholics who interpret Jesus' statements to mean that after infant baptism, only penance is needed.⁶

⁴ Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, electronic version (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-98).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985).