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Foot Washing, Leadership (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this piece, Steve Gregg takes a closer look at John 13 and the importance of interpreting Jesus' promises in the upper room discourse. Specifically, the passage focuses on the act of foot washing, which Jesus uses to demonstrate the importance of humility and servitude as traits of a good leader. While foot washing was traditionally the responsibility of the lowest-ranking servant, Jesus himself took on this task to show that leaders should see themselves as no better than those they lead. While foot washing is not necessarily a sacrament, it remains a symbol of humility and a powerful reminder of the importance of serving others.

Transcript

Today we'll be turning to John chapter 13, and I hope that we can take the entire chapter, which is 38 verses, in this session. John chapter 13, it's the official beginning of what we would call the upper room discourse. In our last session, we studied the passages in the Synoptic Gospels that talked about Jesus instituting the communion meal with his disciples, the Last Supper, communion, Eucharist, and it's also been known by other names.

But we read of that in yesterday's material and talked about that, and of course at the time that Jesus instituted that meal, he was with his disciples in the upper room. Now, the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, although they all do record that event, they record nothing else after that. They don't record what Jesus said privately to his disciples on that occasion.

All of the Synoptic Gospels, after telling of this Passover meal that he had with his disciples, say that they went out and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where of course Jesus was arrested later that evening. Mark's version says, when they had done this, they sang a hymn and went out. And Matthew and Luke, I think, also make reference, not to the singing of the hymn, but going out of the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane.

Only immediately, it's recorded after the meal that they took. Now, John, who wrote his

gospel much later than the Synoptics, probably, traditionally, it has been thought that he wrote his gospel perhaps in the 90s of the 1st century, which would put it at least a few decades later than the other gospels. He wrote his gospel to supplement what the other gospels did not include.

And they did not include anything of this upper room discourse. And you could get the impression from reading the other gospels that Jesus had the meal. It was a brief meal, and they went out, and he was arrested.

But John lets us know that there was an extensive discussion that took place. Jesus was the principal speaker. The disciples did interact with him a bit, but he did most of the talking.

It was sort of his final opportunity to teach them, since he would be taken from them later that evening, and he would be crucified the next morning, and they would not see him again until his resurrection. And so this was sort of a last chance to prepare them for what was about to happen. And it's very important, many of the things he brought up here.

One of the things that makes it difficult, however, is that since Jesus was in the room with his apostles alone, as near as we can tell, that is, we don't know that anybody was present at the Last Supper other than Jesus and his twelve apostles. And, of course, Judas left the room before very long. We read of that in his chapter.

The things that are said to them speak of special privilege and special promises and so forth, which we as Christians have always wished to claim for ourselves, understandably. Though it's hard sometimes to know how many of these promises he made applied to them as apostles, that is, how many of them speak only of apostolic privilege, since that was his whole audience. There was no one else there but the apostles.

And we do know that in the book of Acts and throughout church history, the apostles have been revered as having a special place of status among Christians generally. In fact, Jesus said to Peter, back in Matthew chapter 19, when Peter said, Lord, we've left all and followed you. What shall we have? Jesus said, Well, you twelve will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, indicating they'd have a unique status.

The exact meaning of his prediction has been debated and talked about and not important for us to establish at this point. But the point I'm making is that the apostles were unique. They were different than others.

They had an authority that transcended that of other people. And therefore, it's not always easy as we read the upper room discourse. And Jesus makes a great number of promises to the apostles, whether these promises apply to them as apostles only or whether they apply to them as Christians generally, because the apostles were

Christians, of course.

All the apostles were Christians, but not all Christians are apostles. And therefore, it becomes difficult at some points to decide how many of these promises are for all Christians and how many were simply apostolic privilege that Jesus was describing. I will say, though, that much of what he says to them there, we do have repeated in other places, in the epistles that were later written to the churches.

And we can certainly deduce from these cross references that much of what he said applied to them not as apostles merely, but as Christians generally, and we can claim those for ourselves as well. In the very nature of some of the things Jesus said, we can tell that it's generic, but some of the other things we might have to be cautious about claiming for ourselves unless we are apostles, and my opinion is we are not. Okay, I do know that some people believe there are apostles today.

I'm not convinced of this, and therefore, I would have to say some of the things Jesus said may have applied to the apostles in their lifetime and don't have an application beyond that. I'll tell you particularly what passages would appear to be that way, to me at least, when we come to them. Now, the upper room discourse begins in the 13th chapter, and it goes through chapter 14 and 15 and 16.

Now, it's not certain whether Jesus uttered everything actually in the upper room, everything that's in these chapters, although we call it the upper room discourse, and that's what it's generally been called. Some of the things may have been uttered after they left the upper room and as they were en route to Gethsemane, where Jesus would later be arrested. One reason for saying that is that at the end of chapter 14, two chapters prior to the end of the discussion, in chapter 14, verse 31, the last line, Jesus says, Arise, let us go from here.

And then he just keeps talking in chapters 15 and 16. Now, there's a couple of ways of understanding what took place. No action is described.

That is, the gospel doesn't describe that they got up and left the room. We just have him saying, Arise, let us go up, let's go from here, which suggests that they probably did. They probably stood up at least at that point when he said, Arise.

But it's possible that they remained in the upper room cleaning up after themselves and as they were, I mean, we don't know how long it took them to get organized. And Jesus may have continued to say the things that are in the 15th and 16th chapters even as they were still preparing to leave. They rose from the table at that point, but they may not have left the room immediately.

Or, of course, they may have left the room at that point, and chapters 15 and 16 would not properly speaking be part of what was said in the upper room, but what was said en

route from that place where they took the Passover meal to the Garden of Gethsemane where he would be arrested. Now, having said that, I just want you to be acquainted with this body of teaching, this block of chapters in John. It's the lengthiest discourse of Jesus recorded anywhere in any of the Gospels, even longer in terms of chapter numbers than the Sermon on the Mount, which was also spoken to his disciples.

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew occupies three chapters, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, whereas this discourse is four chapters, and therefore it is very significant. It's more extensive than any of the discussions or discourses of Jesus prior to this in the Gospel of John or any of the Gospels. Let's begin at the beginning.

Now, before the Feast of Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come and 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 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 Peter said to him, Lord, are you washing my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing to you, you do not understand now, but you will know after this. Peter said to him, You shall never wash my feet. And 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.

For he knew who would betray him, therefore he said, You are not all clean. Okay, now, this washing of the disciples' feet is a very important story. And we are not told why he did it at this point.

Although we could, if we had no other information from any other source, we might deduce that it was one of the more important lessons that Jesus had to teach the disciples, was that they should be humble, since they would forever after this be the leaders of the church. As Jesus was going away, these twelve men would someday, and not very far off, be revered as the de facto heads of the church. And that kind of authority, that kind of unchallengeable leadership, can go to a man's head.

It can be a bit intoxicating. And more than one religious leader, as well as political leaders, have been intoxicated and corrupted by authority. And the disciples were going to know such authority, and it was very important that Jesus teach them that real authority was, of course, in him, Jesus.

And if he would humble himself in the way he did to wash their feet, they should take that as a model of what leadership is to be like in general, especially their own. He, in fact, makes that point when he explains what he has done in the verses that follow, which we have not yet read. But I'd like to turn your attention back to Luke chapter 22 just for a moment, because Luke gives us some information that probably sets the setting for us in a clearer way.

You'll notice in Luke chapter 22, which we studied yesterday, or in our previous session, verses 14 through 23 are the institution of the Lord's Supper. Then in verse 24, which we did not study yesterday, it says, But there was also rivalry among them. This is right after they took the supper.

There was also rivalry among them as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And he said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so among you.

On the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as one who serves. No doubt referring to the washing of their feet.

But you are those who have continued with me in my trials, and I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my father bestowed upon me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Okay, now one thing about this passage. It probably gives us the setting for Jesus and the rationale that Jesus had for washing their feet on this occasion.

Right after he had instituted the Lord's Supper, right after he said, This is my body, which is broken for you. This is my blood. This cup is the New Testament of my blood, which is shed.

He is speaking very plainly about his own death, his blood, the shedding of his own blood. The disciples are missing it, like they missed everything. Every time he said anything like this, it just went right over their heads.

They didn't grasp it until after it was all over. And we're told that several times. There's been three times previously in the Gospels that Jesus said to them, We're going to Jerusalem.

The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and scribes, and they're going to kill him. They're going to condemn him and kill him. And he's going to rise the third day.

He said that to them three times in words just that plain. And the Bible says they didn't understand. They debated among themselves, What's he mean by rising from the dead?

What's this all about? They were dull of hearing, the Bible says.

Now here also, they must have been extremely dull because he just instituted the most solemn ritual of Christianity and made reference to his death, which of course, when it dawned on them that he was going to die, which was somewhat after this, when he got arrested, it made them very sad. But they didn't even have enough insight to be sad on this occasion. All they could think about was who is the greatest among themselves, which of them was going to have the prominence in the kingdom.

This was a perennial problem among them. We have encountered at least, I think, two other occasions where Jesus had to sit them down because they've been talking about who is the greatest among themselves. And one of those occasions was, I think, in Matthew chapter 18.

And he had said essentially the same kinds of things that he said in this passage to them to correct them. It says in Matthew 18.1, At that time, the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child to him and set him in the midst of them and said, Surely I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoever receives one little child like this in my name receives me. Now, he's saying, of course, that you have to be humble like a child. He says the same thing to them on this occasion in Luke chapter 22.

He says that the greatest, in verse 26, has got to be like the youngest. Of course, in that society, the older people had the greater status and the youngest person had the least. And so, if you want to be great in God's sight, you have to assume a status that is below that which you might otherwise assume.

You must take the lowest position and be like one who serves if you're going to govern. And governing the church is a service. It is not a privilege, it is a service.

The person who would govern a church, or govern any group of people in a godly manner, must do so as a servant. In our own country, elected officials are called public servants. And that is, of course, a very good thing for elected officials to do, is serve the public, although in many cases, though they do no doubt provide a service for the public, because those offices are so frequently held by people who are not Christians, not governed by Jesus' teaching, not governed by Christian spirit, their power goes to their head, even though they're elected to serve the public.

They often do things that they know the general public doesn't want done, but they are in the position to do it and they exploit that to the full. And, you know, the idea of

allowing gays into the military, for example, that's not something that the majority of Americans want. And there's a lot of things like that.

The majority of Americans are not radical feminists, and yet radical feminist agenda is being pushed through by Congress and so forth because of a loud and vociferous lobby, and they're not really representing their constituents. Now, I'm not here to make protests about that, but what I'm saying is that this is the human, the nature of man, that even if a person's title is defined as a public servant, it's not natural for human beings, once intoxicated with power, to still keep a servant's attitude. They still begin to act like kings.

They still begin to act like they are the ones who are over, the ones they're supposed to be serving under. And Jesus said, that's how it is with the Gentiles in Luke 22, 25. He said, the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors.

But it's not to be sold on you. You're not supposed to rule over. And he's talking to the apostles here.

You're supposed to rule under. You're supposed to go under and support. You're supposed to serve as the lowliest position.

Now, I believe that at Luke 22, 26, at that point, no doubt, Jesus went and washed the disciples' feet, as we read about in John 13. And then the words of the remainder of that portion of Luke would apply. Having washed their feet, he comes back to the table, no doubt.

Or maybe he's not yet back to the table. He says, for who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? He means in an ordinary household. The one who brings the food to the table were the slaves, the servants of the household.

The one who sits at the table is being served, and therefore he is considered to be the one of highest rank. The ones who serve are of low rank in the household. The one sitting at the table is of higher rank.

And he says, who is greater, he who sits at the table or he who serves? And he answers his own question. Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as one who serves. This statement would be particularly apropos if he had just washed their feet.

Because he had just removed himself from the table. They were seated at the table. He was serving.

He was washing their feet. And he says, now, this may seem strange to you. Ordinarily, the person who sits at the table is the superior.

And the one who serves is the inferior. But you know me to be your Lord. You know me to be the Messiah.

You know that I am every man's superior, and yet here I am serving. And that's what I want you to learn, to do the same. Now, that is apparently the setting in which this foot washing took place.

Let's look back at John 13. John takes an extraordinarily long time to get around to telling the story in this chapter. He takes three verses to sort of set the stage.

And unlike, you know, someone just telling a story, he gives us an awful lot of information about what's going on in the minds of the parties that are involved. What's going on in Judas' mind. What's going on in Jesus' mind.

He says in verse 1, Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come, and he also knew 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. Now, love them to the end sounds like it means to the end of his career or whatever. Maybe to the end of all time.

But the end, or the word end in the Greek actually means to the utmost. It probably speaks of the degree rather than the length of time of his love for his own. I think most commentators would stand by this suggestion that it means he loved them to the utmost.

And no doubt, that is to be understood in terms of Jesus' own statements a couple of chapters later. In John 15, where he says in verse 13, John 15, 13, Jesus, a greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. That is to say there are differing degrees of love, but there is none that exceeds this, to lay down your life for those who you love.

And to say that Jesus loved them to the utmost, this is John's interpretation. I mean, it's true, but this is John's explanation of how Jesus had given all and was in the process of doing so at this very time. He loved his own.

He was on his way back to the Father, but he had held back nothing in terms of his loving and his self-surrender to his friends. And it says in verse 2, and supper being ended. Now, actually, the Alexandrian text says during supper here.

The Textus Receptus says after supper, or the supper being ended. And therefore, the King James and the New King James, and probably, I'm not sure, probably the Douay and others use the Textus Receptus and the Luther Bible, I think. A few older, you know, the older Bibles do, I think, follow the Textus Receptus pretty consistently.

But the modern translations will probably say after or during supper. It's just a difference

in different manuscripts. And it doesn't really matter.

One thing we know is that in the Synoptics, we were reading of them having supper. They were at the table, and Jesus instituted the Passover meal and the new meaning of it. And it was either during that supper or after it was over, depending on which manuscript is true or has the right reading.

Now, if it was during supper, as the modern translations prefer, then it would suggest that maybe this dispute among the disciples, this rivalry that broke out over who is the greatest, caused Jesus even to have to interrupt his own meal to get up and do what we're now about to read of. He just, you know, he was just in the middle of the meal. He wasn't even finished eating yet, nor were they.

And he saw that their minds were on the wrong track so badly that he just interrupted, set his fork down, or his saw, and went around and washed their feet, as it says here. It says also in verse 2, The devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. Now that happened, as we read earlier in the Synoptics, when Jesus, apparently when Jesus rebuked Judas.

Judas complained because this woman Mary had broken an alabaster jar of perfume over Jesus' head. Judas complained that the money could have been better spent, and Jesus defended her and said, Leave her alone, she's done a good deed. And we're told in the Synoptics that Satan entered Judas' heart at that time, and he went and betrayed Jesus.

So here, John is simply looking back on that fact. There's already something that had happened. The devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.

Jesus, knowing, there's a lot of knowing and stuff that is talked about here. It's interesting that John tells what was going on in Jesus' mind, even before he rose from the table. Even though we are to presume that John did not deduce this from Jesus saying so.

Although that is possible. Remember John, the writer of this gospel, was the most intimate of the disciples to Jesus. He describes himself as the beloved disciple, or the one whom Jesus loved.

Even at the table, as we'll see later in this chapter, John is in closer proximity to Jesus than Peter is. Now that doesn't say anything about their relative authority in the church later on. It's just a fact.

At the table, Peter, when he wanted to ask Jesus a question privately, he asked John to ask him for it. Why? Because the Bible says John was lying on Jesus' bosom. Now whether that means just right next to him or actually leaning on his chest, Jesus was probably on his stomach because in those days they didn't sit up in chairs.

When they ate, they sat at a low table and they reclined, really, on couches. Actually on one side. They'd lean on one elbow, usually the left, and eat with their right hand.

And the couches would extend away from the table. So their feet would be away from the table and their heads toward the table and they'd lean on one elbow and they'd eat that way. That's how Middle Easterners always ate in those days.

That's why it was possible on another occasion when Jesus was eating in the house of Simon the Pharisee that a woman could come in and start washing his feet with her hair. His feet were extended out where somebody on the periphery could get at them to do such a thing as that. And that was the posture of those eating.

They weren't sitting. And exactly what the situation was where John was leaning on Jesus' breast or whatever, I don't know. But we certainly didn't interpret the language to mean that John was closer.

As close as could be to Jesus. And Peter, actually, later in the chapter, asks John to ask Jesus a question for him. So John was a very close disciple to Jesus.

And he knew what Jesus was thinking. Partly maybe deduced from what Jesus said and partly just from his intimate knowledge of Jesus. In any case, John is telling us all these things about what was going on in Jesus' mind.

In verse 3 it says, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, now we get the action of the story. Jesus rose from the supper and laid aside his garments and took a towel and girded himself. So he wrapped a towel around his waist.

And 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. Now, foot washing in modern churches is either not practiced, or in some denominations it is practiced, but it is practiced without anything like the same significance that it had on this occasion. I've never been to a foot washing service at a church.

I have been in churches that practice it. I was for six years in a church in Bannockburn that practiced foot washing on an annual basis, but I never went to any of their foot washing services. And I think many Mennonites practice foot washing, and I'm not sure what other denominations they do so.

But I'll bet you, just knowing human nature, I'll bet if people who go to such churches go to a foot washing service, I'll bet the one part of their body they make sure is clean before they arrive is their feet. How much do you want to bet? I mean, think about it. You're going to a service where somebody is going to take your shoes and socks off, they're at the public meeting, and wash them in their hands.

Are you going to make, will you not do everything? You'll probably spray deodorant all over them, you know, all kinds of stuff to make sure that your feet don't smell bad. I mean, such foot washing services have got to be symbolic merely. And many, at least some denominations, practice foot washing as something like, I guess, something like a sacrament.

It has symbolic value, like baptism has symbolic value, or communion does, or whatever. Or whatever other things are done for the value that they have of representing something else. But when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, although there was, of course, a message behind it, he was performing an actual service that needed to be rendered.

They didn't have nice paved streets and sidewalks like we do to walk on. Everyone walked around in the dust and the dirt. They didn't have shoes that covered their whole feet like we do.

They wore sandals, generally speaking. We know that from actual statements in the scriptures. John the Baptist said he wasn't worthy to carry Jesus' sandals, for example.

And therefore, their feet would get dusty and dirty. And I don't know how many of you have ever spent any time in a third world country. But, I mean, it's a lot worse getting the dust from the streets of a third world country on your feet than it would be in this country.

I remember in Seoul, Korea, though, you know, if you travel the main highways in Seoul, it's got a beautiful false front of modern buildings and skyscrapers and great... I don't know what it's like now. It's been many years since I went to Seoul. But I remember thinking when I was driving from the airport and looking at the buildings, I thought, this is a very modern, like, western-like nation.

But then, when you go about a block in, behind those buildings, you'd find the real Korea, the real South Korea there. And it was dirt walkways and streets and stuff, and people out in the marketplace selling their dog legs, you know, for food and stuff. I mean, just all kinds of stuff.

And I'm not trying to put them down. I'm just saying it was a different Seoul than the cosmetic Seoul that you saw from the main roads. And I remember distinctly, as soon as you took one of these back roads, the strong smell of urine.

You'd have little kids be peeing right by the side of the road there. And I haven't been to very many third-world countries. The ones I've been to have been somewhat like this, and I've heard about a fair number of others that my friends have been to.

Remember, in biblical times, the whole world was third-world. There weren't paved streets. There weren't hygienic laws and so forth.

And therefore, no doubt, people just became accustomed to the smell of excrement, both human and animal, and urine and so forth. And this was all mixed in with the dirt that got kicked around as you walk around in your sandals. And a person's feet were defiled just walking from one house to the next.

Now, if you've ever been in Asia or even Hawaii, because Hawaii has a very dominantly Asian culture, you know that it's customary to take off your shoes when you come into a house. And the reason is probably, I mean, I don't know that in all Asian countries, they still have the same reason for doing it that they probably originally did. But I'm sure the reason is because your feet, your shoes get so filthy just walking on the ordinary streets that you wouldn't want to trample any of that into the living quarters.

And so people would take off their shoes as they entered the house. They still do in many Asian, probably in all Asian cultures. And, you know, this is still enforced in Hawaii in much, much, much of it.

It's not a bad idea. It keeps the carpets cleaner and everything. But it's probably in no sense as necessary for the same reason today as it was when that custom originated.

And in biblical times, people would not only take off their shoes when they entered the house, they'd be met by a servant and the servant would have a basin of water and wash their feet. Now, the stuff that would come off their feet. Now, we live on a farm.

And I've washed my children's feet since living on the farm. And it's a totally different experience than when we live here in town. I mean, I used to bathe my kids when we lived in town.

I've bathed them since we live on the farm. And especially in the summertime when they go either barefoot or just wearing sandals. I mean, the whole water turns foul.

And we don't, I mean, and it's clean dirt on our place, you know. But it's not such water you'd want to bathe in after they've washed them. And I'm sure that it was a tremendous stigma of unpleasantness attached to the task of washing feet.

In fact, from everything I've read, it was the task assigned to the most, the servant with the least seniority or the least rank. It was the most foul duty that any servant in that society would ever be assigned to. It would be comparable, I suppose, to, well, I'm inclined to say, you know, a person who cleans toilets or something.

But, you know, with the modern brushes and cleansers and things like that, that's not even a very defiling kind of a job anymore. But I remember when we were in band and we had problems with our septic system once. And a guy from Roto-Rooter actually had to go down into the tank.

And I looked down there. And I remember thinking, you couldn't pay me any amount of

money to go into that thing. And it's not that I'm a prima donna or anything like that.

I'll do lowly work. But that place has got to be the worst of all possible venues for anyone to work in, in this country. And I thought this guy is really humble.

And I was impressed. This guy has got to be humble to take a job like that. Because, I mean, that septic tank was just caked, you know.

It was a foul-smelling thing. Now, I'm trying to give you a graphic illustration here. It's working? Okay, well, the servants who washed people's feet were the lowest servants.

And the washing of feet was the most degrading of jobs in a household. And, you know, for some reason, the disciples had not had their feet washed when they came in that room. Possibly because the room had been prepared and the host had left it and given them total privacy.

And none of the disciples volunteered to do it when they came in. And so they all just went to the table without their customary foot washing. And so Jesus, at this point, when the disciples are arguing about who's the greatest, he decides to give them a little object lesson of what greatness really is.

And he goes and he takes off his regular clothing. Because, no doubt, sloshing that kind of water around would make your clothing defiled. But he put on a towel and he got a basin of water and he went around and he washed the disciples' feet.

And just how lowly and how humiliating that job was is reflected a little bit in Peter's reaction, of which we read. In verse 6, it says, He came to Simon Peter and Peter said to him, Lord, are you washing my feet? And 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.

Now, Peter, of course, was not being very submissive to his Lord on this occasion. But I'm sure that his objection was intended to be, you know, upholding the dignity of Christ. It's certainly below your dignity to wash my feet.

It's like John the Baptist. When Jesus came to him to be baptized, John said, Me baptize you, you should baptize me. When Jesus humbled himself in the presence of people that knew him to be their superior, they often had struggles allowing him to serve them or to humble himself in that way before them.

And Peter has that same reaction. I can't let you wash my feet. It's too degrading.

It's below your dignity. And Jesus said to him, If I don't wash you, you have no part with me. Then Simon Peter, being the pendulum swinger that he was, said, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

And Jesus, you know, bringing balance and sanity back to the situation, says, Listen, anyone who's already taken a bath doesn't need to be washed except his feet. In other words, Peter, you've no doubt bathed recently enough. You don't need me to wash your hands, head and so forth.

This isn't symbolic. You're not dirty except for your feet. Now, I don't know how often people bathed back then and whether Peter had bathed that day or not.

They might have bathed in order to observe some ritual cleanliness. We have to realize that our ideas of cleanliness and the ancient ideas of cleanliness were very different. I remember when my wife was studying to learn how to make soap, she went to the library and got some books about soap.

And we were real surprised to learn that, you know, how little soap has been used in history, you know, in ancient times. And certain queens in medieval times bathed once a year. It was customary for them to bathe once a year.

The rest of the year they just covered themselves with perfume. But, you know, bath water, it seems like a queen could get a servant at least to heat some water more often than that. But maybe soap was too precious, too hard to come by, or maybe they just had different standards of, you know, that.

I can't get dressed in the morning until I've showered. I can't imagine living in a time where it was customary to bathe once a year. And I think in, oh, a century or so ago in this country, I think people generally bathed about once a week.

And as I understand it, in, you know, families like out on Little House on the Prairie, you know, kind of situations, they'd get, you know, one tub of water. And the cleanest person would bathe first. And they'd go through the whole family bathing that one day, and down to the dirtiest.

And the dirtiest, you know, he was already dirty, so the fact he was getting in dirty water could only be an improvement. But that was the custom. And it was inconvenient to heat that much water.

We didn't have hot water heaters like we do. And bathing just wasn't the obsession or the convenience that we have today. And I don't know whether Peter, you know, had bathed, you know, in the last month or two or, you know, twice that year or what.

I don't know what the customs were in those days. But it's very possible that Peter had not bathed anywhere near as recently as you and I probably have as we sit here right now. Unless, because it was Passover season, they had observed their ceremonial washings.

And that is possible because if a person had touched a dead body or come near anything

unclean, they would by law be required to wash themselves just for ceremonial purposes. And that's possible. In any case, whether Peter had just bathed or had bathed in the past month, Jesus felt like Peter wasn't in need.

He wasn't scheduled for another bath at this point. But his feet need to be cleaned on a regular basis. Now, many have seen a symbolism in Jesus' remark here.

He that is bathed has no need except to wash his feet. Some have seen the reference to Jesus cleansing His disciples in a figurative sense of His cleansing us from sin. Because it does say in 1 John 1 and verse 7 that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

And Jesus has cleansed us by His blood. It says that in Revelation 1 and verse 5. I think it's Revelation 1 and 5. Actually, that's only in the Textus Receptus. It reads differently in the Alexandrian.

But in the King James and the older Bibles, it actually says He has cleansed us by His blood. That is, yes, Revelation 1 and 5. The last line. He loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.

And this comment is made by John, the writer of Revelation, who is also the writer of the Gospel we're reading now, who just said that Jesus loved them to the end. He may have some of the same ideas, maybe the same event in mind. Jesus loved us and washed us with His blood.

The Alexandrian text says, and freed us by His blood. So it's a little different there. Nonetheless, we know that it is a biblical concept that we are washed clean of our guilt of sin by the blood of Jesus, and He is therefore the one who washes us from sin.

And some have felt that when Jesus said to Peter in the end of verse 8, if I do not wash you, you have no part with me, that this has a mystic parallel in terms of washing away sin. That if we aren't washed by the blood of Jesus, we can't have any part with Him. And then when Jesus said to Peter, he who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, that this is a continuation of this thought, that once you have been washed from all your sins, once you've been converted and come to Christ, and you've been forgiven of all sins, you don't need to get converted again and again and again.

But you may need your feet washed. That is to say, you don't need to get saved all over again, but you may need to get forgiven of individual sins that you accrue through walking in the world. The feet were the part of the body that comes in contact with the world.

And they got defiled by contact with the world. That's why they had to be washed. And a Christian walking by faith in this world, having regular contact with this world, can at times be defiled by the environment and may need to come again for cleansing.

So it says in 1 John 1.9, if we confess our sins, and the Greek word is in the imperfect tense, so it's if we are confessing our sins or continually confessing our sins, he is faithful and just to continually forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1.9. And therefore, even though we don't have to get saved all over again whenever we, in our environment, we contact a temptation and even succumb to it and become culpable or guilty of sin, we don't have to get saved all over again. We just need our feet washed.

We don't need a complete bath all over again. Just those occasional defilements that come up have to be treated on an ongoing daily basis. And some have understood Jesus' words that way.

Now, I can't say whether Jesus intended that mystic meaning behind it or not. I can say it's an interesting preaching point and it's been thus preached. It could be that that meaning is underlying it, but I don't know for sure.

Anyway, Jesus said in the end of verse 10, And you are clean, but not all of you. And, of course, the not all of you means not Judas. Judas isn't clean.

For he knew who would betray him. Therefore, he said, you are not all clean. Now, if Judas was in the room, then that settles the question we raised in our last session of whether Judas took the last supper with Jesus or not.

It's not altogether clear when you read the synoptics whether Judas left before or after the supper. But Judas was apparently in the room here, especially from the sequel here. There's more about it.

And since this all happened after supper or during supper, I think we have to assume that Judas took the supper with him. Anyway, we go on now. Verse 12.

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? Now, remember back when Peter first objected to him washing his feet. In verse 7, Jesus said, What I'm doing you do not understand now, but you will understand after this. Well, now Jesus is going to make him understand.

He gave the object lesson first, then he explained it later. Peter, trust me on this. Let me do it, and then I'll explain it to you later.

You'll understand when you need to understand. You don't understand now, but allow me to do this, and then, rest assured, you will understand. And so here he gives them the occasion to understand.

He says, 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.

Now, it is on the basis of these verses that some churches do still practice foot washing, and I don't condemn it. I don't have anything to criticize about it. There's certainly nothing wrong with having foot washings, but I will say this.

I do not believe that Jesus intended by this remark that Christians throughout all time should literally wash each other's feet in all cultures and at all times. I do believe that he is saying that Christians at all times do need to serve one another humbly, as he had done and had exhibited his willingness to do by washing their feet. The thing is, the practice of washing feet had a practical purpose in those days.

It was a practical service. Their feet had to be washed by somebody, and most people probably would not wish to wash their own feet, given the kinds of stuff that they'd follow the water with, although many people maybe had to do so if they didn't have servants. But that was something a lowly servant would do, and it was a practical service.

Notice Jesus wasn't interested in washing for impractical reasons. Peter said, Wash my head and my hands and my whole self. And Jesus said, Come on now, you're not that dirty.

Let's just wash the dirty part, the feet. Anyone who's bathed only needs his feet washed. Now, that would suggest that Jesus wasn't interested in washing as a symbol merely.

And if we wash one another's feet, literally today, if we have a foot-washing service, okay, now tonight, because we read John chapter 13 today, and we saw Jesus said, I want you to do what I've done. I washed your feet. You should wash each other's feet.

We're going to have a foot-washing service tonight. You'll all go take a shower, or at least you'll wash your feet and come with clean feet, and we'll have a foot-washing service which will be absolutely worthless. Worthless in this respect.

Your feet won't be any cleaner when you leave than they were when you came. You have had no practical benefit from it. Now we could say, But it was a humbling and meaningful experience.

Well, that may be. That may be. And I don't wish to deprive people who have gotten blessing out of foot-washing services.

I'm not trying to say they can't do it or don't want to. I'm simply saying that if they are doing it, because they think that Jesus established foot-washing as a sacrament, I think they're missing this point. I'd much rather have somebody clean my house than clean my feet, because my house sometimes needs to be cleaned.

My feet seldom do, and when they do, I take care of that myself. A foot-washing service doesn't really perform as a needed service. There's no felt need there that's being addressed.

But in those days, it was. It'd be more like cleaning... I need someone to come clean my septic tank. I need someone to come down there and scrub the walls of my septic tank.

Now, if you would do that, then I would say you're doing what Jesus said to do here.