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John 13:1 - 13:17



Gospel of John - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg interprets John 13, emphasizing John's intention to supplement rather than duplicate the other gospels. Gregg also discusses Jesus' act of washing his disciples' feet, highlighting its symbolic significance as a continuous cleansing and the importance of serving others as Jesus did. He reminds listeners that although everyone is prone to sin, they should confess them and continuously strive to live a holy life. Finally, Gregg stresses the value of humility and being a servant to others as Jesus exemplified.

Transcript

Okay, we're going to turn to John chapter 13 now. And with John chapter 13, we have a turning point in the Gospel of John, because everything up to this point has been either the year of obscurity, where he only had a few individual conversations that are on record, like with Nicodemus and the woman at the well, or they have been public ministry, mostly in Judea, filling in gaps that the other Gospels leave untold. And most of his discussions in the Gospel of John that were in public were conflicts with the religious leaders of the temple and the Pharisees.

Not all of them, but for the most part, they were. The theological discussions that he had, we've looked at. They take a long time to sort through, because almost every verse has something rather deep in it.

And we've come, by the end of chapter 12, to the end of his recorded public ministry in John. We still have a good portion of the book left to cover, but it's all, until the crucifixion at least, private talk between himself and the disciples, or himself and the Father. In chapters 13 through 16, which is four chapters, we have the longest recorded discourse of Jesus, and it's given privately to his 12 disciples, or 11 before the night was over, and it is his farewell discourse to them, usually called the upper room discourse, because it occurred in the upper room, where the Passover had been eaten.

One thing that's rather interesting, John gives more information about what transpired in the upper room than any other gospel does, and yet he doesn't mention the Last Supper. At least he doesn't mention the institution of the body and the blood ceremony, of the

bread and the wine, which is really kind of strange when you have four chapters devoted to what went on in that room. And what most people would think is the most significant thing is not even mentioned.

But that only goes to illustrate what we said all along, that John seemed to deliberately be trying to supplement rather than duplicate what the other gospels had already said. All the other gospels, of course, told about the institution of the Last Supper, the Lord's Supper. But John, writing considerably later, and aware of what's already been written previously, he's just filling in gaps.

So he can tell four chapters on the upper room and just skip over the Lord's Supper. And some, I guess Roman Catholics would say that he actually had covered that in a different way in John chapter 6, when he talked about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Though in my opinion, I don't think he was talking about communion there.

I don't think he was talking about the Eucharist. Because in John chapter 6 he was in fact saying that some were currently, present tense, eating his flesh and drinking his blood and having eternal life. Yet no one was taking the Last Supper at that time.

That was a whole year before he instituted it. So whatever he was referring to as eating his flesh and drinking his blood, it was not that. And of course we said that it would appear from the parallel statements in John chapter 6 that he was referring to believing in him.

Coming to him and believing in him was equated to eating his flesh and drinking his blood. And therefore it had apparently nothing to do with the Eucharist or with the communion meal. But in any case, we come to that upper room, the same upper room, the same occasion, that we are acquainted with the Last Supper being initiated or inaugurated at, but we pass over that.

And we concentrate almost entirely on Jesus' personal ministry, dialogue, mostly monologue, but it's interrupted from time to time by something the apostles will ask or say. And so this is his longest recorded interaction with the disciples, unbroken. Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come, that he should depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Now, love them to the end in the New King James is really kind of a slavish following of the King James Version, which said love them to the end. And that is a reasonable translation, but almost all commentators and most new translations will render it in a way to let us know that it's not talking about love them to the end, like a chronological end, like the end of his life, but rather to the utmost, to the farthest extremity. In other words, his love for them was, it's talking about the intensity rather than the duration of his love in this particular case.

And it said he knew his hour had come, and that's something we read about a lot in the book of John, his hour. And what we've always read about it before is that it hadn't come. His hour had not yet come.

People took up stones to stone him, but they didn't because his hour had not yet come. People sought to take him, but they couldn't because his hour had not yet come. He had said to his mother, woman, what has your concern to do with me? My hour is not yet.

He said to his brothers in John chapter 7, my hour is not yet, but your hour is always. He did say, however, in chapter 12, in his prayer to the father, he said, in verse 27 of chapter 12, my soul is troubled and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I came to this hour. So he's at this point talking about his hour has come.

And in chapter 13, verse 1, it says, knowing that his hour had come, that he would depart from the world to the father, having loved his own who were with him in the world, he loved them to the end. And the supper being ended, and that's the supper. By the way, having having ended is possibly not the best translation.

The Alexandrian text says and during supper. And so it seems that actually the Alexandrian text is to be preferred in this case because it's supper wasn't ended. We can see that they're still at the table and they're not really done with their meal.

And so it's not that it was supper being ended as the new King James and the King James say, but rather, as the modern translations will say during supper, while they were still eating, the devil having already put 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. Now, this is a very complex sentence.

There's a lot of subordinate clauses. You know that the subject, of course, is Jesus in verse one. And the verb is rose from supper in verse four and laid aside his garments.

So that's the simple sentence without all the subordinate clauses is Jesus rose from supper and laid aside his garments. But in between, John has all this, this having happened, this having happened, this having happened, this having happened, talking about what was going on inside Jesus' head, what was going on inside of Judas' head. And so what are the things that were going on in Jesus' head on this occasion? He knew that his hour had come.

He knew he would depart from this world. He had loved his disciples as much as a man can love them. As he will later say in chapter 15, greater love has no man than this, than that he laid down his life for his friends.

That's the ultimate in love. And supper being ended or being during supper, as we

pointed out, the alternate translation, the devil having already put it into our Judas Iscariot. So now we got we got some idea of what's going on in Judas' head.

And then 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, that's kind of the the flip side of what says in verse one. In verse one, what he knew was kind of sad stuff.

His hour had come. He's going to depart from from the world and leave his friends. But he also knew, as verse three says, that the father had given all things into his hands.

Now, he had said something along those lines in chapter five when he had said that the father has committed all judgment to the son and has given the son to have life in himself, even as the father has life in himself. But especially his statement that he had committed all judgment to the son. It's like God has put everything in his hands.

There's a statement in the in the synoptics, the one statement in the synoptics that sounds very much like the Gospel of John, actually, that is in more than one of the synoptics, but particularly it's in Matthew, chapter 10 or 11. Let me see. I've got to find it here.

Yeah, it's 11, actually. Matthew 11. This sounds like it's taken right out of the Upper Room Discourse in John.

In Matthew 11, 25, it says, At that time, Jesus answered and said, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them unto babes, even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight. All things have been delivered to me by my father, and no one knows the son except the father, nor does anyone know the father except the son, and he to whom the son wills to reveal him. That verse 27 in particular sounds like it sounds out of place in the synoptic Gospels, because that kind of talk is not generally featured in the synoptics, but is very common in the Gospel of John.

One of the that's one of the little things that God, I think, providentially allowed to be there of all the things that were not included in the synoptics. One thing God made sure was included was that one verse, Matthew 11, 27, which is also found in, I think, Mark or Luke or both. And it shows us that the Jesus in the synoptics is the same Jesus in the Gospel of John.

Maybe the Lord realized that later skeptics would say, well, the statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John totally have a different type than the ones in the synoptic Gospels, couldn't be the same Jesus. One of those accounts can't be historical, but we do have tremendous overlap just in that one verse. And we have the same idea that we just read in John 13, that he said, all things have been delivered to me by my father.

And that's what John 13 is saying. Jesus knew that the father had given all things into his

hands and he knew he was he'd come from God and was going to God. That is to say, he knew who he was.

He was under no illusions about the grandeur and the glory of his person, of who he was. He was from God. He's going back to God.

Everything's in his hands. He's the most powerful man in the world at this time. He actually says as much in chapter 16 before this discourse is over.

At the very end, he closes the discourse with these words in chapter 16, 33. These things I've spoken to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you are in tribulation, but be of good cheer.

I have conquered the world. That's what overcome means, conquered. I have conquered the world.

There he is with a ragtag group of people hiding out from the authorities in the dark. A man who at one time had thousands of people following him now has no one following him except these few. One of them is a devil.

In that rather unpromising situation, he says, cheer up. I've conquered the world. He didn't look like a world conqueror at that time, but he knew that the Father had put everything into his hands.

As he said in the discourse, the prince of this world is coming and he has nothing on me. He hasn't been able to get his hooks in me at all. I have resisted, I have defeated him.

The prince of this world has been defeated by me. Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

And so, Jesus, although he didn't have the look of a conqueror in this situation, actually knew himself to be in charge of everything. He was in control of everything. At the moment where he seemed most vulnerable, when they arrested him in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, if I wanted to, I could call 12 legions of angels and they'd come rescue me.

And that would be kind of overkill for the job, frankly. 12 legions of angels. What's a legion? 6,000.

72,000 angels. Do you know what one angel can do? We know of an angel that killed 185,000 Assyrians. Of course, they were sleeping, that makes it a little easier, but I think he could have done it if they were awake.

He killed 185,000 soldiers in one night. One angel. What could 72,000 angels do to that group of soldiers or guards that came into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Jesus? And, you know, he had the power to escape if he wanted to.

He didn't have to go to the cross. He said, no one takes my life from me. He said in chapter 10, I have the authority to lay it down and take it up again.

Everything was in his hands. He didn't look like the winner in this circumstance. But that was the irony.

That's the paradox of the gospel, that things in the spiritual realm are often exactly the mirror image and therefore look upside down compared to what's going on in the material and visible realm. And here's Jesus hiding so that he won't get caught. And it says he knew God had put everything into his hands.

He had conquered the world. And so in that position as the world emperor, as the Lord of everything, he takes his outer clothing off and he dons a towel and thus resembled a slave or a servant in the household. Verse 4, he rose from supper and laid aside his garments and took a towel and girded himself.

Now, Peter, of course, was deeply affected by this thing that happened next, as we shall see. I mean, all the disciples no doubt were, but there's particular interaction between Jesus and Peter in the verses that follow. And later in Peter's first epistle, in 1 Peter chapter 5 and verse 5, Peter said, Likewise, you younger people submit yourselves to your elders.

Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed in humility. He talks about being clothed in humility. He must have been thinking about Jesus who took off his ordinary clothes and put on humility.

He put on the towel that a servant would wear to wash feet. That's the humblest of all garbs that a man could put on. And here the one who knows that he's the king of the universe and that all things are put into his hands and that he can do whatever he wants with that power, he re-clothes himself in humility.

And he goes around and does the humblest of all acts that could be done in Jewish society, and that was to wash feet. Now, foot washing had a different significance in those days than it would in a church today where they have actually, you know, some churches actually practice foot washing as sort of a ritual. But in America, when people go to church, if they go to foot washing, you'd be quite sure they go with their feet quite clean.

If they know that someone else in the church could be taking their shoes and socks off and handling their feet, they're going to wash their feet real good, probably better than ever before they go to church. They're going to need their feet washed less at that moment than they've ever, ever needed them washed. And the foot washing service is going to be absolutely symbolic and of no practical value.

And there was something very symbolic about Jesus washing his disciples' feet, as we'll

see, but it was also a very practical service. Because people didn't wear closed up shoes, you know, they wore sandals. And in the dust and the stuff of the third world streets, your feet get caked with dust, and it's not very clean dust.

If you've ever been in a third world country and walked down one of those streets, you know what it smells like? It smells like urine, because people pee on the sides of the road. And sometimes pee is running down the side of the road, along the sides of the road. The place smells like urine.

And of course, there's animal droppings and so forth, and they just get all mixed into the dust. And so the dust is very unclean dust. And they knew it.

I mean, they didn't know about sanitation in those days like we do. They didn't know about germs and all, but they knew that that dust is not pleasant stuff. And so whenever a person would enter somebody's house, the lowest servant in the household would be given the chore to wash their feet.

They'd take off their shoes, as people still take off their shoes when they enter a house in Asia today, or in Hawaii, or many other places where there's Asian culture. And they would not be able to simply walk into the house with their bare feet, because their bare feet would be very filthy. And so a servant would wash their feet.

And it's sort of like washing a sink full of really, really dirty dishes, and it's foul looking, disgusting water and stuff, and you don't have any play text gloves. And you feel like, oh, I got to really wash my hands after I'm done with this, because this is gross. And that's the kind of situation that the servant would have who washed somebody's feet.

We can think of worse things, no doubt, and maybe they could too, but it was definitely the humblest thing. It was the chore that was given to the servant of the lowest status in the household. And therefore, when Jesus came around to wash his disciples' feet, now we don't know if their feet had failed to be washed.

When they came to the upper room, it may be that since they had chartered the room, they didn't charter a servant, and they didn't have their feet washed. Or maybe they had washed their feet when they came in, and Jesus was doing merely a symbolic gesture. We aren't really told whether their feet were dirty at this time or not.

But the value of his gesture was more symbolic anyway. It was symbolic because washing feet was the lowest chore, and the one that very few people would be humble enough to do if they weren't forced to, if they weren't a slave. Now, any one of the disciples, I'm sure, would have washed Jesus' feet.

But it's probable they wouldn't have washed each other's feet, because they would think themselves too much on the same level with each other to wash their feet. It was too humble a chore. And this is what Jesus did.

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, we don't know how many disciples he did that to before he got to Simon Peter. But, of course, there was an interruption in the routine when he got to Peter, because Peter is the one who always speaks his mind.

He probably isn't thinking any differently than the rest of the disciples about this. They're probably all thinking the same thing he is, but he's the one who always blurts out whatever he's thinking. And so 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'm doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.

And it does seem like Peter did understand after this, because it was in the context of leadership and so forth that Peter told everyone to be clothed with humility. And so he apparently did learn the lesson, but not quickly, not immediately. And so Jesus said, the time will come when you'll understand what I'm doing.

In the meantime, just trust me. I know what I'm doing here. And Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet.

Now he wasn't trying to be rebellious, he was trying to give Jesus proper respect, saying it is impossible for me to allow you to debase yourself below me. It's like when John the Baptist said, you want me to baptize you? You should baptize me. But Jesus said, permit it to be so, thus far.

And so John submitted, actually Peter ended up submitting too, but it's like when Jesus would come and offer to take the lower position, like to be baptized by John, people knew, this is awkward, this is strange, he's the king, I'm supposed to be serving him, not the other way around. And Peter therefore, just basically protesting out of respect for Jesus, not out of rebellion or the desire to be disobedient, he says, you shall never wash my feet. And Jesus answered him, if I do not wash you, then you have no part with me.

Now, he told Peter that he wouldn't understand now, but would understand later. I'm sure that Peter didn't understand now what Jesus said, if I don't wash you, you have no part with me. But we shall see that this washing of the feet was not only about servanthood, which it was, it was also about atonement.

It was also about the cross, as we shall see, because he makes a comment that makes it clear, he's not just talking about physical washing here. He's talking about the need of a person to be washed by Christ from their sins. And Jesus says, if you don't let me wash you, you won't have any part with me.

Now, Peter didn't understand it, but of course Peter didn't like the way that sounded, and so he responded with a pendulum swing, as he tended to be the extremist. He said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. So, okay Lord, if that's

what it means, if being washed by you means that's how I stay with you, that's how I have a part with you, then give me the full treatment, give me the deluxe job.

Wash my hands and my head and all the rest too. Jesus, being much more balanced, said to him, he who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean. Now, what he's saying there is, you know, anyone who's kept up their normal hygiene, anyone who's already had a bath recently, is clean enough.

They don't need their head and their hands and every other part of the body washed when they come to a meal. They do need their feet washed, because their feet, of course, get dirty. Even if you took a bath and then left your home and walked somewhere, your feet would be dirty when you got there.

The rest of you wouldn't be. So, what he's saying, if you've had a bath, you don't need to be washed again, except for your feet. Your feet get dirty from walking, but the rest of you doesn't.

So, that's what Jesus means. He that is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean otherwise. And then he says this, you are all clean, but not all of you.

For he knew who would betray him, therefore he said, you're not all clean. And this statement, John tells us, this is a symbolic act. Because the clean here he's talking about is not talking about having been bathed or not being bathed.

He's talking about Judas being unclean spiritually. Judas had it in his heart from Satan to betray him. Judas had a dark and dirty heart.

The others were clean. The others were pure. The others were innocent.

But Judas was not. And therefore when Jesus says, if you're bathed, you're all clean except for your feet. And you people have all been clean.

But one of you is not clean. Not all of you are clean. One of you is really foul.

But the foulness and the cleanness, of course, of that last statement speaks not of their feet or their bodies, but of their hearts. And so here we see that there is a double entendre in this foot washing. We'll find that it is exemplary, and he makes that point to them afterward, that they should do what he did.

That is, he does it as an example. But prior to that, it is a symbolic act of his own sacrifice to cleanse the heart of sin. And the disciples at this point were clean in their hearts, but one of them was not.

But the point that Jesus seems to be making is that once a person has been cleansed thoroughly, they still only, they need cleansing occasionally. But only the part that gets dirty. Only their feet.

As preachers sometimes point out, your feet are the part that comes into contact with the world. And so the Christian who has been born again, has been washed and justified and cleansed, they're clean. They're like permanently clean.

They don't have to get saved again. They just stay clean. They stay saved.

But through their contact with the world, there does come defilement. Now pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to keep oneself unspotted from the world, James said. And so to remain unspotted from the world is definitely the goal.

But it's not a goal that is always achieved. It's not a goal that we're always successful at. We want to be unspotted from the world, but in many things, James said, we all stumble.

And therefore, our feet get dirty. We don't get all dirty. We don't become filthy again.

We don't become like Judas, who is not clean inwardly. We still have the benefits of Christ's cleansing and atoning. But there needs to be additional cleansing of just in the area where there has become defilement.

And of course, I'm sure many would think in this connection of 1 John chapters 1 and 2. Because in 1 John chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, John says, My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he himself is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

Now we have been cleansed of our sins, but we sometimes sin. Now John said, I'm writing this so that you won't. Not sinning is the norm.

That's an important thing to note. Many people say, well, the norm is that we all sin many times in thought, word and deed every day. Well, that's not really a norm for Christians.

That may be average, but it's not normal. Christians are not supposed to sin many times in thought, word and deed every day. I was actually raised thinking that that was true.

The particular denomination I was raised in, they said that quite frequently. They wanted to make it very clear, don't you ever plan to be holy. Don't ever plan to live a sinless life.

Don't even think about it. They actually said that you have to sin in thought, word and deed every day, many times every day. And if you ever have a day where you think you didn't, then you're guilty of the sin of pride.

So damned if you do and damned if you don't. It's like a dilemma. You either do sin and acknowledge it and therefore you're guilty, or you don't acknowledge it and therefore you're guilty of being proud.

But they make it sound as if sinning is the Christian norm. In fact, the Christian necessity. Like you have to do it.

The Bible teaches you don't have to do it. John said, I wrote this to you so you won't do it. If anyone does, we have an advocate with the Father, thankfully.

But I'm writing so that you won't sin. Do we have to sin? No, we have to not sin. That's what the Bible teaches.

We have to not sin. Now if we do sin, fortunately there's grace and there's cleansing and there's atonement. And that's the foot washing.

We don't lose our salvation when we sin. But we become defiled and we have fortunately an advocate to whom we can appeal. In chapter 1 of 1 John, it says in verse 8, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

And the truth is not in us. But it says, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us, wash our feet of all unrighteousness. Not re-save us over again like we lost our salvation by sinning.

But to just cleanse us of whatever unrighteousness we've picked up through sinning, which we now confess. And that is how we apparently get our feet washed again, is by confessing our sins. You see, it has to do with the way we walk, of course.

And feet walk. In chapter 1 of 1 John, verse 7, it says, if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. So as we are walking in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us continuously from all sin.

What does walking in the light look like? It looks like telling the truth about your sin. Living in the light instead of receding into the darkness. We know that John's Gospel says in chapter 3, that the condemnation of man is that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Because whoever does evil hates the light, and wants to be concealed in the darkness. But whoever does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds might be seen, that they might be exposed, that they are done in God. So in the light is where you can be seen for what you are.

In the dark is where you conceal what you are. And John says if we walk in the light, then of course that means we are being transparent, we are allowing ourselves to be seen for what we are. And that is expounded on in verses 8 and 10.

If we say that we don't have any sin, then we are not in the light. Because we do have sin. If we say we don't, then we are not walking in the light.

And therefore our sin remains. But if we confess our sin, now that is walking in the light. Being honest about it.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Notice verse 7 and verse 9, both have the same object at the end, that we are cleansed. At the end of verse 7, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

At the end of verse 9, He cleanses us from all unrighteousness. What is the means by that? In verse 7, it is walking in the light. In verse 9, it is confessing our sins.

Confessing your sins. Being honest about your sins. That is walking in the light.

And as you walk in the light, and you are not pretending to be something you are not. You are a true Christian, but you are not trying to be looking holier and more perfect than you are. Then, you remain in fellowship with God.

And Christ's blood cleanses us as we walk in the light. He washes our feet, so to speak. And He continuously cleanses us as we continuously confess our sins.

And so, Jesus is the advocate. If anyone does sin, then we confess it. And we are cleansed by our confession of sin.

Because if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father. And that is Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is our propitiation. The sacrifice of atonement that God sent for us.

By the way, when He says, I write these things so that you do not sin, I mention that we do not have to sin. But, if you expect not to, you may be disappointed. Because we do succumb to temptation out of foolishness, out of weakness, out of inattentiveness, just carelessness or whatever.

And we do stumble. James said we all stumble. But Paul said that there is no temptation taking you, but such is His common demand.

In 1 Corinthians 10.13, he said there is no temptation taking you, but such is His common demand. And God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted more than you are able to endure, but will with the temptation provide a way of escape that you might be able to endure it. So, whenever you are tempted to sin, there is a way of escape.

You will never be tempted in a way that you will have to succumb. God will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to endure. If you are sinning, it is your fault.

God has not tempted you. God has not allowed you to be tempted beyond what you can endure. Remember what James said in James chapter 1? Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.

He means, don't say that God has put you in a situation that is more tempting than you can endure. God doesn't tempt anyone with evil. He can't be tempted with evil.

He says, but when everyone is tempted, He is drawn over by His own lusts and enticed. It is all your fault. If you sin, it is all your fault.

Because you didn't have to. The churches might teach you that you have to, because they don't want to get your expectations too high, and they get tired of counseling all these people living under condemnation. So they say, don't worry, everyone sins.

It is kind of normal. Well, I don't think it is normal. It is average.

Basically, we have to remember that most Christians have struggles. I think probably almost all Christians. Maybe all Christians have struggles in certain areas that seem to continually defeat them.

But it is not because they are tempted beyond what they are able to endure. It is because we are not as diligent. None of us are as diligent as we ought to be in looking for that way of escape early on in the process of being tempted.

Anyway, there is cleansing. If we fall, there is cleansing. And that is what I believe Jesus is referring to.

Although He is using the imagery of a natural body being clean by having been bathed, but still occasionally needing the feet washed, because they do get dirty in the process of walking. So He says, but if you have been bathed, you only need to wash your feet. You don't have to get saved all over again.

You just need to maintain your walk with God. You need to maintain your cleanliness. If you have fallen, you need to confess and walk in the light.

And fortunately, the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses from all sin. But He says, all of you are clean except one of you. He didn't say except one of you, He said, but not all of you are.

He says, you are clean, but not all of you. And so John tells us that this cryptic statement is a reference to Judas, and thus telling us that much of what Jesus said about cleaning and so forth is symbolic of one's moral or spiritual condition. But then, in verses 12 and following, another lesson from this foot washing comes out.

Besides the symbolic meaning of cleansing, there is now the issue of serving and humility that Jesus wants to draw from it. And so in verse 12, So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments on again, and sat down, He said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? They didn't answer apparently. I'm not sure I'd want to answer.

If I said yes, then He'd say, Okay, explain to the rest of these people here just what this

means. I'm not sure I'd want to be put in that position at that particular stage. And if you said no, then you just expect Him to say something like, How long must I bear with you? Are you still without understanding? When He asks a question like that, Do you understand this? There's 12 of them there, let someone else answer first.

And no one wanted to answer, so He just goes ahead. He says, You call me teacher and Lord, and you say, Well, for so I am. He was under no illusions about that.

He didn't have to adopt a phony low self-image. He knew what He was. He was the Lord.

He's the teacher. He's in charge. He's the one that they should call by those kinds of honorific titles.

In fact, He's the only one they were allowed to call that to, according to the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 23, He says, Don't call anyone teacher. Don't call anyone master or rabbi, except me.

I'm the only one you've got. So He says, You call me teacher and Lord, and you say, Well, for 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 sent greater than him who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them.

Now, several things here. One is that He says, If I have washed your feet, then you should wash each other's feet. And it's this statement that some groups, some denominations and other groups, have taken to be sort of the institution of a sacrament or an ordinance or some kind of a ritual that should be done occasionally.

I think churches that do it, I don't know how often they do it, maybe once a year or something, they have a foot-washing ceremony. I think Church of God in Anderson, Indiana, I attended for a while, I think they did it once, do you know? They do it, I think, and I think Mennonites do it, if I'm not mistaken. And a lot of groups have practiced this foot-washing.

Now, I've never actually been at a foot-washing service. And the people who have been there, because I've known several people who attend such churches, they've always said, Oh, it's really a great blessing, it's just, you know, the Lord's really present when this happens, so forth. And I'll just take their word for that.

I'm sure that they're telling the truth. And I'm sure that it depends entirely on what's going through a person's head while that's going on. But I would say this, that I think it's a mistake to interpret Jesus' words, you ought to wash each other's feet, to mean that the church needs to periodically have a ritual of foot-washing.

It may well be that it's helpful. Lots of things can be helpful. Lots of rituals can be helpful, but not mandatory.

The question is, was Jesus literally saying that Christians should wash each other's feet or something else? Well, washing feet today, as I said earlier, wouldn't really have the same value. It's not so unpleasant to wash the feet of someone who's been bathed and washed their feet and put on clean socks and shoes and came to church in order to have their feet dunked in water. It doesn't have the same practical value.

It doesn't have a function. What Jesus did in that society was extremely functional. It was a dirty job someone had to do.

And what he was doing was taking the dirty job. Now, it may be, like I said, that their feet had been washed before they came in and his actions were more symbolic, but even if they were, what it was was taking on the role of a foot-washer, which was, in all other circumstances, a dirty job. And something that is one of those jobs that everyone hopes someone else will volunteer for.

Many of you know about Eric Little, who was the Olympic runner. The movie Chariots of Fire, he was featured in that, his story. He not only won a gold medal in the Olympics, but he went back to China where he had been born.

He was a Scottish Christian born of missionary parents in China. And he had come back to Scotland for a while, and it was during that time that he ran in the Olympics and won a gold medal. But he then went back to China and lived out his life there.

But during World War II, the Japanese invaded China, and they did some very, very cruel things to the Chinese and to the Koreans, too. I mean, the Koreans and the Chinese often have some bad feelings toward the Japanese because of things that the Japanese did to them during the war. And when the Japanese came into China, of course, they were at war technically with us, so any American missionaries or diplomats or anything that were found in China, when the Japanese came, were rounded up and put into internment camps.

Now, these were not torture camps like Hitler had for the Jews. They weren't death camps, but they were not kept up, either. I mean, the Japanese in the war were not very humane to anybody that was not their friend.

And Eric Little, as a missionary in China, spent his last days in one of these camps. He died in one of those camps with a brain aneurysm or something. It took him rather suddenly, but he was there for a while.

And those who were with him in the camp report that he was just, had such a servant's heart. And one story that's told is that the latrine in the camp frequently had the drain plugged. The floor drain was clogged.

And people would still use the place because they didn't want to defecate out on the yard and so forth, so people would go in there or perch on the doorstep or something and do what they had to do. But the place, the latrine often had several inches deep of human waste just on the floor. And Eric, no one wanted to clean it.

And Eric Little would just go in there. He'd go waiting in it and just clean it up. He'd be singing hymns and whistling and praising the Lord.

And he was a very cheerful man, a very godly man. And everyone just so appreciated him because no one wanted to clean that latrine. And he just did it without being asked.

And he just praised the Lord while he was doing it. He just kept such an attitude of cheerfulness that his servant's heart just impressed everybody. And I'm sure, I don't know how many, but I'm sure many people came to the Lord through it.

But even if they didn't, his actions were totally pleasing to God. And what he did was very much the parallel of what in Jesus' day would be doing the foot washing job. What he did was probably a lot grosser than washing someone's feet, but it was still the job nobody wanted.

It was the thing that if you had a slave, you'd give the slave with the lowest seniority that job to do. And that's what Jesus is saying. I don't think Jesus is saying it's important that we wash each other's feet.

He and his disciples probably did not envisage at that time any culture like ours where people are mostly clean. And they wear shoes and socks and their feet don't get dirty walking. And they walk on pavement.

And they just don't get their feet fouled everywhere they go. So that you should wash one another's feet, I think is more like code for you should do the lowest acts. The acts of the lowest servanthood.

The most undesirable things for one another. And for that reason, I don't think that so much having a foot washing service is necessary in keeping with it. Though it could be.

Like I said, it depends on what's in the head of the people who are doing it. If they're saying, by washing your feet, which you really don't need done. But I'm doing it anyway symbolically to say I'm your servant.

I'm available to serve you in other ways that you may need to be served. And this foot washing is just my way of declaring that. That could be, I'm sure, very edifying.

But I don't think that it's necessarily right-headed to say, well Jesus said we're supposed to wash each other's feet. So we need to schedule foot washing services sometimes. Because otherwise we're disobedient to Jesus.

Well you may have foot washing services every day of the year. And still be disobedient to what he's commanding here. Because it's not really that awful to wash American feet.

But there are some jobs, there are some tasks that would be awful to do. Some things that not everyone would want to do. And the Christian who steps forward, like Eric Little did.

And just does those jobs cheerfully, in order, out of love. It's basically something done out of love. It's not done grudgingly.

It's done because someone's got to do it. And I don't want anyone else to have to do this. Because I care for these people.

The last thing I'd want is for these people to go in this muck here. So I'll go do it. It's like you would lay down your life easily for your children.

If it was a choice between you suffering and your children suffering, it would be a no-brainer. You wouldn't have to think twice about it. You'd sooner suffer than have any of your children suffer.

Well, it's just like looking at everybody else as if they were your children. They're not. They're God's children.

And he cares about them as much as you care about yours. And your love for them, then, translates into acts of service. And taking on the tasks that you would not wish your children to have to do.

I mean, you wouldn't wish to have to do it yourself either. But you would spare them. And these acts of service means that you do things that are really the things that someone has to do.

But no one wants to do. That would be the parallel today to foot washing in the time of Jesus. Now, what's interesting about this, of course, is that it specifically mentions at the beginning of this that Jesus knew that all things were delivered into his hands.

And what he took into his hands was a bowl and a towel and feet. And those are the things that most people wouldn't want in their hands. But he did this coming from a place of knowing his true place of privilege and his true status.

Lots of people will serve other people, but they'll do so because they just feel like, I'm not able to do anything better than this, or I'm not worthy to do better than this, or I'm the lowest person around here anyway. There are people who have some really unusual, low self-image, some unnatural and unhealthy low self-image. And their acts of service may be loving, or it may just be their way of saying, you know, I'm the guy who really deserves to do this because I don't deserve any better.

They're punishing themselves for something, who knows. But Jesus wasn't that way. Jesus wasn't punishing himself or thinking, I'm so low, I should serve these people because they're definitely way above me.

No, he knew he was way above them, but he came down lower. It's symbolic of what even he had done on the grander scale that Philippians 2 talks about. Though he existed in the form of God and thought equality with God not a thing to be grasped, he emptied himself and took on the form of a servant, even to the point of dying on the cross.

So it was as one who was in the form of God that he willingly took the lowest spot. Not that he was forced into that position, either by an unrealistically low self-image or by anyone compelling him to do it, but rather coming from a place of strength, coming from a place of in control. Because in God, I'm a son of God.

I'm the son of God in his case. But all of us, we are all sons and daughters of God and we all have status. And therefore, from that, we who are strong ought to bear with the weakness of the weak, Paul said.

If I'm coming from a strong place, I can make the sacrifices that a weaker person cannot make. And therefore, I consider it my place to do. That's what I have to do.

If I think of myself as a person with privileges in God, then I can have a healthy way of looking at myself and feeling about myself and still put myself lower than everybody else. In fact, that's really the only way to really be humble. It's not really humble to just think that you're a clot of dirt and therefore you act like a clot of dirt, but it's when you realize that you're a prince or a princess of the universe.

That you're somebody who's been purchased with a price. You're a pearl of great price. You're a treasure that was hidden in a field that Jesus died for.

You're of great value and now you as a valuable person are being asked to go and value others above yourself, which you do from a place of strength, not from a place of weakness. Jesus was acting from a place of strength here. He says, I know I'm the Lord and I'm the teacher.

You call me that and you should. That's what I am. But it's knowing myself to be your Lord and your teacher.

It's from that place that I bring myself down to serve you. And that's what you need to do also. If I, your Lord and your teacher, serve you, then you certainly have no excuse not to serve each other.

Because your master and teacher is above you and he'll go below you. You're going to have to work hard to go lower than that. And yet your position isn't above your teacher.

He says, most assuredly I say to you, verse 16, a servant is not greater than his master. That is not more privileged. Now your master has served you and you're not greater than him.

So you need to serve others as well. Neither is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. The word he who is sent in verse 16 is the only place in the Gospel of John that uses the verb related to apostle.

The word apostle is, of course, a noun, *apostolos*, and it means one who is sent. And obviously there's a related verb to that. And this is the only place in the Gospel of John where that verb is used.

But he's referring to them as ones who are sent as apostles, of course. Much of what he has to say to them in the words that are following in this discourse have primary application to them as apostles. Much of what he says to them has a broader secondary application to all Christians.

But not every part of it. Not every part of it applies to all Christians. For example, chapter 15, verse 27, he says, and you also will bear witness because you have been with me from the beginning.

Well, they had been with him from the beginning. You and I have not been. We weren't there then.

So it's obvious that much of what he says to them is to them as apostles. You will bear witness of me because you've been with me from the beginning. Well, then it looks like the instructions are related to the particular role they had as being with him from the beginning.

Not that no one else will ever bear witness of him. We can bear witness of him too, but the point is that the instructions here are primarily to them as apostles. And so he says that he who is sent, meaning an apostle, is not greater than the one who apostolized him.

And that's an important thing to note when we get to verse 20, which we have not yet done. Now, in verse 17, he says, if you know these things, what things? These instructions about serving each other. If you know those things, you'll be happy if you do them.

Now, that's counterintuitive because one would not think that you'll be happier by serving other people than having servants yourself. Now, anyone who's been a Christian for very long knows this, but a person who's not a Christian would not generally assume that it's a happier life to be serving other people than to be served by other people. Because people who are served are usually the rich.

They're usually the powerful. They're usually the ones who have status and privilege in society, and that's why people serve them. Either because they're paid to serve them, because the person is rich enough to pay servants, or else people serve them because they're in a powerful position and people want to kowtow to them.

People want to suck up to them and want to get privileges that they can confer. Most people who are served are privileged people who are privileged in just the ways that the world offers to the carnal desires of people. The desire to be loved, to be fond on, to be recognized, to be feared, to be revered, to be a star, to be wealthy.

This is what many people think. Oh, that'd just be living. Well, it turns out that people who actually are in those positions don't seem to realize that that's living.

A lot of them find it very perturbing. In fact, they become drug addicts in many cases. They can't keep their relationships together.

They go through a series of marriages, and none of them are happy in many cases. They've got nothing but money, but they live self-destructive lives in many cases. I'm not saying everyone who's rich or famous has these problems, but it certainly seems like these privileges don't ward off those problems, because a very large percentage of the people who have the money and the fame and so forth, and who have the servants and who have the fans, they are the ones who also have the problems, life problems, relationship problems.

Now, I'm not saying that poor people don't have a lot of those problems, too. All I'm saying, and I'm not saying that being in the privileged position is what makes you have those life problems. It can.

Obviously, when they follow up on people who won the lottery, many times they find that there's hardly anyone who's ever won the lottery that didn't ruin their life, and all their relationships. The very privileges that people crave often are the poison that will kill them, or is the thing that will ruin their life. But even if that's not so, even if you can handle it, even if there are people who do have fame and fortune, and they still have a happy life, the point I'm making is that there's plenty of people who have the fame and fortune and don't have a happy life, so you can't assume that fame and fortune in any way confer a happy life.

Having people know your name, having people serve you, having people do your will, that might sound like living, but in itself it isn't. It doesn't confer happiness, but loving servitude does. If you love people and you serve them, that will be what gives you joy.

It's paradoxical, but Jesus often spoke paradoxically. He said, if you know about this secret, you'll be happy. You'll be a happier person if you do it.

This is really where happiness will come from for you, if you love each other enough to

serve. Now, we know that Jesus did this out of love, because it says in the very opening of the chapter that he loved them to the utmost. It was in that context that it says, and having loved his own, he put on a towel and served them.

He wasn't serving them out of some kind of a slavish, legalistic obligation. He did it because he loved them and he knew this would be good for them. When you love somebody, nothing can give you more joy than knowing that somehow you've blessed them, somehow you've made their life easier or happier or more free from headaches or whatever.

Alleviating suffering from somebody you love is the most fulfilling life there is. Now, if you serve others and you don't love them, that's a different story. Because if you serve someone you don't love, you're either doing it because it's your job and you don't like it because you don't love them, or because you're a legalist and you figure, well, I'm a Christian, I'm supposed to serve this person, but I wish I didn't have to.

That's not a happy life. What makes service happy is love. If you love others as Christ loved you, and later in this chapter, Jesus is going to say, this is the commandment I have for you, that you love one another as I have loved you.

And his washing their feet was a function of that love. The washing the feet, the service to others, isn't a happy thing in itself, but loving somebody as Jesus loved and serving them and putting them above you and doing everything you can to make their life more a blessing, that is happiness. That is joy.

You know, I had what should have been a very unhappy marriage for 20 years, because it was a very difficult marriage. And it was a marriage with unrequited love. The kind of thing that when people hear some of the things, they say, man, that would be a horrible thing to be in.

But I never knew I was unhappy. In fact, I don't think I was unhappy. After my wife left, I realized life was a lot easier, but I would have said I was happily married, and I thought I was.

Either I was clueless and in denial, or else I really was happy. And I think I really was happy. The reason was that I did love my wife.

And I was there to serve her. I mean, as soon as I'd been married a short time, I realized she wasn't going to be serving me any, and she wasn't going to make it her priority to make me happy. So I thought, well, I got my work cut out for me.

You know, I've got to make her happy. Never succeeded, but had a great time trying, because I did love her. It was a joy to serve her.

It was a joy to do everything I could to try to make her happy, and thinking I was making

her happy for a while there. That's where joy came from. In a marriage, or in any relationship, or in a church, it's not how people treat you that will determine whether you're happy or not.

It's how much you love them and pour yourself out for them, as Christ did for us, really. It's basically imitating Christ. He said, I've given you an example that you should do as I've done to you.

And if you do, you'll be happy, he said. And happiness is elusive these days, it seems like. There's a lot of people who are not particularly happy.

A lot of young people don't appear to be happy, and they're looking for entertainment or something all the time to alleviate the angst that seems to be hanging over so many people of the younger generation, and the older generation, too, because we know what's going on, too, in the world. Yet happiness is elusive to people, but it's really easy to be happy if you don't care about being served, and you just care about serving others, because you love them. That's the thing.

If you love as Jesus loved, and serve as Jesus served, not because you think you're lower than other people, but even if you know that you're not. Even if you know that you're in many respects their superior, maybe in rank, maybe in character, maybe in some other way. You know yourself to be superior, but you don't act superior because you don't think that superiority means privilege.

It means servanthood. Whoever will be the chief among you must be the servant of all, Jesus said in another place. So greatness is being like Jesus, because he's great.

And being like Jesus means being the servant of all. That's greatness, as he said. And Peter understood this later, because we see it in his epistle, when he wrote it.

He said, Be clothed with humility. Humbleness doesn't mean you think low of yourself, but it means that you put yourself in a lower position, that you don't put yourself in a high position, even if you know you could acquire it, that you could even qualify for it. That's not what you do.

You're trying to put other people up at your own expense, if necessary. And that's what being a servant like Christ is. And so that's the lesson of that thing.

Now what happens after this, in this chapter, is strictly a long discourse, which will be characterized by a number of themes that are repeated throughout the discourse, especially through chapters 14 through 16. There's going to be recurring themes about, you know, he's going away, he's going to come back, he's going to send his spirit, and they should love each other, and they're going to be persecuted. And these are some of the themes that he keeps coming back around to in the discourse.

The kinds of stuff that he realizes they're going to really need to know, and this is his last chance to talk to them before his death and resurrection. He'll talk to them again after his resurrection, but they're really going to have to weather a crisis within, you know, 12 hours of the time that he's talking to them. And so this is a crucial conversation that he's having with them.

And so John devotes a lot of space to it, and will devote as much time as we need to to it.