

2. Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet.

Jesus' Final Days on Earth

It was the evening of the Last Supper, and the Lord Jesus took one last opportunity to share a sacred meal with His closest friends. As the darkness descended that evening, Christ prepared His disciples for what He knew would soon be a startling horror. His hour had come. When people know that death is approaching, they will often share thoughts that are very important to those closest to them. Within fifteen hours, He would be crucified. The following five chapters of John's Gospel focus on the last hours and essential thoughts that Jesus would share with the twelve disciples before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

¹It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus (John 13:1-2).

Passover Symbolism

Let's try to get a picture of how the room looked that night. When people think of the Last Supper, they usually recollect the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci. It has become his most well-known work since nearly everyone has seen a reproduction of it somewhere. Leonardo wanted to display the human expressions of each disciple at the moment when Jesus announced that one of them would betray Him. He painted them in a straight line so that we could see the expression on their faces. Although it is a beautiful painting, it does not portray the event as it would have appeared according to what we know about the day's culture. Many details of the picture are inaccurate as to how Jesus and His disciples sat at the Passover Seder, the Jewish ceremonial dinner for the Passover.

Jesus and the twelve disciples arrived at a large upper room already prepared by John and Peter (Luke 22:8), and Scripture says that it was the traditional Passover meal that they ate: “So they prepared the Passover. ¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table” (Luke 22:13-14). The disciples reclined around a U-shaped table called a Triclinium, similar to the one where Mary anointed the feet of Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper (John 12:2). Three tables were put together forming a U-shape, traditionally around eighteen inches above the ground. The disciples probably sat low to the ground on cushions or a low recliner. They would have been leaning on one arm, which left their other hand free to reach for food on the table. Reclining on couches in such a way meant that each person's head was nearly on the chest of the person reclining to his left.

Placed on the table, we would have found an entire meal, not just bread and wine. Of course, since we were not there, we cannot know precisely what Jesus and His disciples shared that night. There is controversy among biblical scholars about whether or not this was the traditional Passover Seder meal or an ordinary Jewish meal. I believe that this would have been the Passover meal because those from Galilee could eat the Passover meal the day before those in Jerusalem:

The Jews of Jesus's day had two different methods of reckoning the calendar. The Pharisees, as well as the Jews from Galilee and the northern districts of Israel, counted the days from sunrise to sunrise. But the Sadducees, and people from Jerusalem and the surrounding neighborhoods, calculated days from sundown to sundown. That meant 14 Nisan for a Galilean fell on Thursday, while 14 Nisan for the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell on Friday.¹

Careful preparation was made for this meal. “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover” (Luke 22:8). On the table, the spread of food would have contained a plate with a stack of (three) *matzot* (thin pieces of unleavened bread). We would have also found other food on the traditional Passover plate (*ke'ara*), including six items that had special significance to the Jewish people. These items reminded them of the harsh life they had in Egypt before God's deliverance from the house of slavery (Exodus 13:3).

There was also an earthenware cup of wine for each person at the table, although some say it was grape juice. The significant point here is that it was the fruit of the vine. Each person would drink from the cup four times during the meal. This night was a special annual occasion, so it took some preparation from Jewish families. The mother of the family would spend the whole week before the Passover meal cleaning the house (In the Western world, we call this a “spring clean”). In this thorough clean-up of the home, the Jewish people were meticulous in removing every scrap or crumb of bread that had leaven (yeast) in it:

For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel (Exodus 12:15).

The head of the family of Orthodox Jews still prays this prayer before the meal, “All leaven that is in my possession, that which I have seen and that which I have not seen, be it null, be it accounted as the dust of the earth.” Often, In Jewish households today, a little game is played with the children by hiding just a tiny piece of bread with yeast. The mother will then tell the child where the last bit is left so the child can find it and burn it on the fire. Removing the leaven (yeast) from the house was an essential part of the celebration of Passover, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Question 1) The Old Testament gives us shadows of values that appear in the New Testament, so what was the significance of removing leaven—yeast before the Passover meal? How does removing leaven or yeast relate to the believer in Christ?

Jesus warned His disciples about false teaching, saying, “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (Matthew 8:15), referring to their prideful teaching. He warned that, if their teaching found room in their hearts, it could spread and puff up the hearts of the disciples (Matthew 16:6). Leaven was symbolic of sin and all that was not wholesome or truthful. Leaven or yeast is what Paul the Apostle referred to when he wrote:

⁶Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really

¹ John MacArthur. *The Murder of Jesus*. Published by Thomas Nelson, Inc, Nashville, TN, page 26.

are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The leaven, or yeast, speaks of sin, the corrupting influence of our inner man and spirit. Yeast is a fungus that inflates the bread. The action of the yeast aerates the dough. It is the picture of a man puffed up by his ego. We must eliminate all pride and self-sufficiency and be transparent and sincere before God.

When we come to Christ, we are to leave the world system behind and say no to servitude to Satan and his deeds of darkness. We no longer habitually allow the leaven of sin to rule over us. Christ, our Passover Lamb, is sacrificed for us to have deliverance from Egypt, a picture of the world system. The Lamb's blood has been shed and put over the door of our house. There is rich symbolism here, i.e., the blood of Christ over our earthly dwelling.

The Dispute Around the Table

The Gospel writer Luke adds to our understanding of the events that night as they reclined around the Passover meal. A dispute arose as to which of the disciples was the greatest:

²⁴A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. ²⁵Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? (Luke 22:24-27).

Can you imagine what it was like for Jesus to sit around the table that night, listening to arguing and bickering about who was the greatest of them? After having spent the last three years of His life with these men and imparting to them the ways of the kingdom of God, it must have pained Him to hear them arguing among themselves and striving for a position as the greatest. Luke does not mention the washing of the feet. John is the only one who talks about this act of servanthood, but it is likely that, while the disciples were in the midst of their argument, Jesus took the opportunity to teach them an object lesson. The Lord got up from the table and began to model servant leadership for them.

The Foot Washing

People from outside the nation had to come at least a week in advance because anyone coming from a country outside of Israel could not worship in the Temple before undergoing seven days of ritual purification.² This cleansing explains why the rulers of the Jews, when accusing Jesus before Pilate, would not enter the dwelling of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator. To enter the home of a Gentile would again require them to go through the ritual purification to eat the Passover (John 18:28).

² Ceil and Moishe Rosen. *Christ in the Passover*. Printed by Moody Press, page 42.

As in other ancient cities of the time, the streets of Jerusalem had very little paving; therefore, walking from one place to another was a messy business, with shoes made of leather sandals tied around the feet with thongs. The dirt and mud would get in between the toes and require foot washing upon entry into each household. To this end, large earthenware or stone containers with twenty to thirty gallons of water, similar to what Jesus turned into wine in John 2, were near the entrance for the ritual hand washing and foot bathing.

A servant usually did the washing as each person arrived. Some Jews believed that only Gentile slaves, not Jewish people, should do the foot washing since the task was so menial. There were likely no servants available during the Passover meal that Jesus shared with His friends. As each of the disciples arrived that evening, none washed their feet, choosing instead to begin reclining around the table with their feet still dirty.

Servant Leadership Exemplified

³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." ⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13:3-9).

I picture the room going quiet as Jesus got up from His position at the table and took off His outer garment. I'm sure the disciples wondered what He was planning to do by stripping off His cloak and laying aside his tasseled prayer garment until He looked the part of a Gentile servant. When He walked over to the entrance to the door, wrapped a towel around Him, and filled a basin with water, they must have been very puzzled. The Lord was teaching them most graphically by His example. He knew this would be a vital lesson for them, and He wanted it to be vivid in their minds.

Question 2) Verses three and four are linked together by the word "so." What is John pointing out to us as he links these two thoughts together? How does it help us to serve others when we know who we are in Christ?

When men or women of God know who they are in Christ and what Christ has done for them, they are free from having to please their self-nature, i.e., their ego. When people truly understand that they are sons and daughters of the Living God, bought by His precious blood (Revelation 5:9), they are empowered to stoop to any task God puts before them. They can deny the desire to please themselves and put others first out of love and gratitude for what Christ has done for each of us.

Nothing done for Christ becomes too menial when we know our position in Christ. We can look in the mirror with a healthy self-image and remind ourselves that we might not be rich in this world, but the day is coming when we will receive the reward of being servants of the Living God.

There is healthy self-respect for even the most unfortunate person who understands what it means to be a child of God. He was powerfully illustrating a truth that would lead them through the days ahead.

Question 3) Why do you think Peter was reluctant to allow Jesus to wash his feet? What did Jesus mean by saying, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me?" (John 13:8).

Have you ever had someone wash your feet in a foot-washing ceremony? It is a humbling experience and is uncomfortable, especially for someone who is proud. Peter resisted this act of humility by Jesus. How could the Messiah of Israel wash his feet? To Peter, it should have been the other way around. That kind of menial task was something that only a servant would do! In the Greek language, the words "you" and "my" are together for emphasis. Peter is incredulous at the thought. His response was, "You mean *you...my* feet!" He says in verse eight, "You shall never wash my feet!"

Self-assertive pride rose within Peter at the thought of Jesus' washing his feet. This type of pride is the fleshly nature we all have. If he had dirty feet, he would clean them himself; thank you! It was abhorrent for Peter to think of the Messiah of Israel washing his feet. We all must be careful when our thoughts contradict what the Lord wants to teach us. His ways are not our ways. God's way of doing things often goes against the grain of our human nature. We prefer to do things our way, apart from God's help. Learn how to recognize those thoughts, and when God gives you a teachable moment, be aware and open to what the Spirit wants to teach you. If you don't, you may miss out on essential truths God wants to reveal.

Bathing and Foot Washing

¹⁰Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. ¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:10-17).

As John the Apostle wrote about the events of that night, he pondered on the fact that He saw Christ wash Judas' feet (v. 12). At the time of his writing his Gospel (Around 90 A.D.), John had found out about the deal made between Judas and the Jewish religious leaders, and looking back, he thought it remarkable that Jesus knew about the betrayal, yet still washed Judas' feet. Luke testified in his Gospel that the deal went down before they sat for the Passover meal (Luke 22:1-6).

The disciples later understood (v. 7) that, just as Jews arrived early in Jerusalem for the washing or ceremonial bathing in the water of the Mikveh before the feast, in the same way, Jesus cleansed

them and us thoroughly from sin by His sacrifice on the cross. This cleansing from sin was foreshadowed in the Old Testament Day of Atonement, a type of the sacrifice of Christ: “Atonement will be made for you to cleanse you, and you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD” (Leviticus 16:30). Paul’s letter to Titus also speaks of this washing:

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

When a man approached God, first of all, he had to fully immerse himself in the water of the Mikvah, which speaks of the spiritual cleansing of the cross of Christ. Only after washing could he approach God through a substitutionary lamb on the sacrificial altar. Without the shedding of blood, there could be no approach to God:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22).

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life (Leviticus 17:11).

Jesus made it clear to Peter that unless the blood of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary's tree washes him clean, he had no part with Christ (John 13:8). There can be no approach to a Holy God unless the sacrifice of the cross of Calvary is imputed (possessed by someone to their account) to pardon us from sin. After the washing, he only had to wash his feet when approaching God: “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean” (John 13:10).

What is the point Jesus makes by saying that only Peter's feet need to be washed? Before a priest could enter the Holy Place, i.e., the outer room of the Temple itself, he had to wash his hands and feet at the bronze laver or basin. This cleansing from sin is imparted to us through the Word of God as we fully understand what Christ has done on the cross.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you (John 15:3).

By receiving the Word of God, i.e., the message of the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ and our obedience to it, we are cleansed. However, we still have to live in this world system contrary to God. As we walk through this life, there will be occasions when we sin. Sometimes, our feet (speaking of our daily walk) will get dirty. We must have our feet washed, which is symbolic of confessing our sins and walking in His forgiveness. Because they had been with Christ, they had come to know Him and would shortly understand the reason for His death as a sacrifice for sin.

Judas Iscariot

²⁰When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹And while they were eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me." ²²They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:20-22).

Judas was more than likely sitting at the table in the place of honor to Jesus' left side as he tried to hide what he was planning. We know this because Jesus was within easy reach of Judas to hand him the piece of bread that Jesus dipped into the dish. The Apostle John gives us more information here:

²¹After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." ²²His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him (John 13:21-27).

The seating order was John reclining to the right of Jesus with his head against Jesus' chest. Although we do not know for sure, some have assumed that Peter was to John's right because Peter asked John to ask Jesus a question ("Ask Him which one He means" v. 24). Was Judas to the left side of Jesus?

If it is so, how did Judas get to the other seat of honor at Jesus' left? This seating of Judas could be the reason for the dispute around the table that night. We cannot be sure, but it is possible that Peter was upset at getting a lesser position around the table due to Judas beating him to the seat alongside Jesus. Their desire for position could have been driven by the expectation that Jesus would soon reveal His kingdom.

Judas could not hide his betrayal from the Lord. He was very good at looking like a believer, i.e., doing the same things, attending the same meetings, and dishing out bread to the hungry, but at the core of his being, there was no change in his heart. Jesus made it clear about the need for an inner change, saying, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). Judas was with Christ for more than three years. In that time, he saw much evidence of who Jesus was, yet his heart grew darker as he hardened his heart to the Spirit's promptings. In fact, in one place, Jesus calls Judas the embodiment of the devil: "Then Jesus replied, 'Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!'" (John 6:70). The Lord knew early on in His ministry just where Judas' heart was:

"Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning *which of them did not believe* and who would betray him (John 6:64).

Satan's Influence

The Scriptures reveal that Judas did not believe and never put his trust in Christ. He had a mental agreement with the person of Christ, but at the core level of his being, he had never received grace and forgiveness for his sin. This was a powerful deception at work.

Our enemy, Satan, a very real spiritual being, is at work in the world to keep hearts and minds blinded to the truth concerning Christ. One can accept the facts of the Gospel and may even understand the great truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, but unless a person receives the person of Christ, there is no change in a person's inner nature. Our enemy loves to hold people in a mental acceptance of the truth, but he works powerfully against them if there is a call to genuine repentance. Paul the Apostle writes about this spiritual warfare to keep a person blinded to the truth:

The god of this age [Satan] *has blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In the invisible realm, a war goes on in the mind's thought processes and the inner man's decision center, commonly called the heart. All hell often breaks loose when people are convicted of sin and see their need for forgiveness. Satan will try to use our family and friends as his mouthpiece. Of course, they often do not realize why they say what they say; there is an enemy spirit at work in those disobedient to the faith.

Why did Judas continue to follow Christ if he did not believe? We cannot know his motives for sure, but perhaps it was the love of fame in being one of the twelve. It can be a curse to be famous. Popularity will keep a person from the humility of heart that God seeks in His servants. The way up is the way down. Judas was famous as one of the twelve. The "stars" of Israel at the time would have been religious leaders and teachers.

Perhaps, it was the money that Judas loved. He oversaw the finances for the party of disciples and was dipping his hand into the moneybag (John 12:6). After three years of being with Christ; he refused to believe (John 6:70). A believer in Christ has spiritual armor given to him that protects him against demonic attack and control (Ephesians 6:10-18). Still, someone who is not yet a believer can be used as a pawn in the enemy's hands.

Question 4) In the divine plan of man's redemption, why would God allow His Son to be betrayed by a friend?

How Did Judas Become Influenced to Betray Christ?

A natural barrier, a protective hedge, prevents a spiritual attack (Job 1:8-10), but some things can lower our defenses and invite satanic activity into our lives. For example, being involved in the occult opens the door to the enemy, but Satan gains access to a person's life through habitual sin. The enemy seeks to get a toehold into the door of our lives, and then a foothold, and after a foothold, a stronghold. The more territory we release to him through habitual sin, the more he will take. Give him an inch, and he will take a mile.

The temptation occurs first in the mind, and the more we yield to the thought, the more ground the enemy takes in our character and actions. The more we surrender our will to sinful thoughts, the more a compulsion sets into our character. Judas was not coerced into doing what he did. Satan did not use external force to move Judas' feet to the religious leaders. Judas went along willingly with the inner motivations that Satan sowed in his heart. A person becomes a slave to the one whose voice he obeys (Romans 6:16).

We must be aware that the mind is the seedbed of our character and actions, and Judas allowed the enemy to visit and sow seeds of destruction into his heart. To have evil thoughts come at us is not in itself a sin. It becomes a sin when we harbor those thoughts and act upon them. One wise person has said that we cannot stop a bird from flying around our heads, but we can stop it from building a nest there. Francis Schaeffer once said, "The spiritual battle, the loss of victory, is always in the thought world." A man is not what he thinks he is, but what he thinks, *he is*. Judas' natural barriers were worn down through the enemy's nesting in his mind and heart. Let this warn all of us to keep our thought life pure.

Judas sold Jesus to the religious leaders trying to kill Christ for thirty silver coins, the cost of a common slave in the time of Moses (Exodus 21:32). The supreme servant of all was valued and sold for the price of a common slave. This was not a rash decision made by Judas.

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Many of us go through this test of being betrayed by a friend, business partner, or relative. Has someone close to you ever hurt you with words and actions? Have you been betrayed? No one can ever say to God, "You don't know what it's like." Jesus took the worst this world could throw at Him, but he still harbored no resentment towards His enemies; instead, He was sorrowful for them. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Have you ever been betrayed? Ask God to help you to forgive. He does not ask anything of us that He will not provide the strength to do. We are called not only to forgive but also to love those whom Jesus loves, His own. It is not easy, but like Jesus, let us love one another to the end.

Whatever you and I experience in life, Jesus has been there and can be sought for help. As our leader, He has endured every fiery trial that can be thrown at us by our enemy and yet harbor no bitterness and resentment. His trust was in His Father every step of the way through the pain of being rejected and betrayed. Whatever you are experiencing in life, He has been there before you and can come alongside you in every trial and help you to go through it.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

Prayer: Lord, I pray for healing for those of us who have been betrayed, hurt, and wounded by others. Thank You, Jesus, for being the perfect model to us in how You responded, turning the cheek to those who hurt You. Would You come and heal us? We pray for those who have hurt us and extend forgiveness to them. Amen.

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