

After last week's lesson, we closed the door on Jesus' public ministry. For the first twelve chapters, we have watched Jesus walk among and associate with friends and enemies. He had some success ministering to the common people who hailed Him as King last in our lesson last week. But the hard-hearted Jewish leaders pressured most of them to keep quiet about confessing their faith in Jesus. He had presented Himself to the leaders of Israel, and appealed to them time after time, but His own had totally rejected Him. Isaiah had prophesied that it would be so, but still, the human part of Jesus would have felt the pain of rejection from His people. It was indeed as John told us in chapter 1, that He came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him.

Yet, as John continued, those who received Him, who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children born of God. So beginning in chapter 13, John carefully relates the details of the private ministry of Jesus with those who did receive Him. For the next six lessons we will be studying the last words of Jesus' personal ministry to His own. John wrote more of Jesus' last night with His disciples than the other three Gospel writers combined. And just as you would carefully retrace the last steps and recap the words of someone who has died, so too are we intrigued with and take to heart these final words and actions of Jesus. He would face His death on the cross in less than one day. He carefully orchestrated His final hours with His closest friends to prepare them for what was ahead. So listen well, and take notes, children of God, while in lessons 13 to 17; Jesus communicates His love for us and gives us His final instructions as to how to carry on as His own once He is gone from this world.

In chapter 12, verse 36, you'll recall that Jesus and His disciples hid from the crowd after the Triumphal entry, but now Jesus and the Twelve had trooped back into Jerusalem, probably from Bethany, to meet in the Upper Room for the pre-arranged Last Supper together. The roads between Bethany and the city were unpaved and dusty, and by the time the group arrived at their destination, their sandal-shod feet would have been dirty. At the door of every Jewish home would be a large pot of water, for the customary foot washing before entry. Most of the time, people washed their own feet, but often, wives washed the feet of their husbands, children for their parents, sisters for their older brothers. If one wanted to honor their house guests, the host had the servants wash the feet of the masters' guests. It was not a labor of love, but rather one of duty for the lowest of the servant or slave in the pecking order. So when no servant appeared at the Upper Room to wash feet, the disciples overlooked what they should have done for themselves.

We note in the first verse that it's Thursday night of Passion Week and people throughout Jerusalem were preparing for the annual Passover feast. This was the third Passover mentioned in John's Gospel, and it would be the last one from God's point of view. The true Lamb of God was about to be slain for the sins of the world in fulfillment of every Passover observance since the first one in Egypt. Many times before when people tried to kill Jesus, He slipped through their hands because His time had not yet come. Jesus knew that now the time HAD come and He

would fulfill His true destiny...finally! Caiaphas' unknowingly prophetic words, that it was better that one man die for the nation than that the whole nation perish, would be fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ less than a day away. It would be Jesus' ultimate Pass-over for He was about to pass over from this world where He had lived as a man for 33 years, back to the Father. What an irony for Jesus, the sorrow and terror of His crucifixion mixed with the eager anticipation of returning to His Father in glory. Jesus was fully aware of all that was about to take place in only a few hours, and yet He completely focused on that evening, carefully selecting the words and the actions which would remain in the hearts and minds of His disciples and leave them and us a legacy.

Verse 1 continues with this; "Having loved His own who were in the world"...*His own*... There is a love Jesus has for all people, and then there is a love for His own. The dynamic of the love relationship for your own is different than the love which you may have for many others. Parents know that....you can distinguish your own child's cry from a nursery full of babies, or your teenager from hundreds in a line of identical caps and gowns as they parade into the graduation ceremony. You can sense where your spouse is even from across the room in a crowd; your grandchildren are the first you see in the line-up of the children's choir. You can probably even distinguish your pet in a kennel full of barking dogs. Why? Because the love for your own has a different feel to it.

Now think about someone you really love and ask yourself, what would I do for that person if my time with him or her was short and I really wanted to show my love?

- Would you write a deeply personal note or letter?
- Buy an expensive gift?
- Give them a large sum of money?
- Send him on a luxury vacation?
- Donate a needed body part or organ?

Or would you show your love by washing your loved one's feet? Even in that's days' culture where it was a common occurrence, it was done out of duty and necessity. Washing someone's feet was a rather unusual way to show the extent of your love!

So we must look at the context to see why the Lord chose to show the full extent of His love for His own in this way.

When we read the chronology of the evening, we saw that the bread and cup of the new covenant had already been introduced and Jesus had, according to the Gospel of Luke, surprised them by exposing one of them as a traitor. Their questioning about the betrayal apparently turned into

bantering about each one's value and position in the Kingdom, which Jesus then resolved with His visual lesson on humility.

The love that would soon be evident in the laying down of His life at the crucifixion was first demonstrated in laying down of His status as Teacher and Lord in the menial act of foot washing, a job for a lowly slave. It was the first step of how Jesus would show the full extent of His love. Paul reminded us in Philippians that Christ Jesus, did not hold on to His glory while on earth, but was willing to make Himself nothing, taking on the nature of a servant and humbled Himself even to death on the cross. Here is where that started.

Get the picture, the boys were pushing each other on and off a figurative pedestal, arguing about their rank and importance and then, with great calmness and dignity, Jesus stood, stripped down to his underclothes, as a slave would be dressed, picked up the basin and the towel, knelt down and began to wash His friends' feet. Focus in the details which we can infer: Jesus knelt down, placed each foot in the basin, rubbed away the dirt, lifted each foot out to dry, how long would that take.....two minutes for each disciple? Even if He had only done five or six of them before He came to Peter, it would have been at least ten minutes of silence.....while they all rather stupidly watched Jesus doing this menial task. It was a complete role reversal, but did anyone offer to help Him or exchange places with Jesus, or even ask why? I'm sure they were not thinking, 'this is a nice ceremony that will be replicated in the synagogues each year at Passover time so that we remember to wash our feet when we come inside.' No, that is not why Jesus washed feet that evening.

The disciples had to time to observe, participate, react and ask, but they were all speechless until Peter spoke up to protest. Peter clearly felt uncomfortable with Jesus on His knees before him. The servant's heart of Jesus made all of them look like real heels! But whereas all of them should have been embarrassed, Peter reacted from pride. "You're gonna wash MY feet?" It was not really a question so much as a refusal to participate in the model that Jesus was demonstrating. Peter was choosing his plan over Jesus' plan.

Jesus statement in verse 8 shows the true symbolism of His action: "Unless I wash you, you have no part in Me." Behind His words was the reality that no one has a relationship with Jesus Christ unless He has first washed away your sins. We cannot participate in His life unless we participate in His death. Peter, and all the other Jews would have to accept Jesus' humiliation, which would be difficult, because the Jews did not want to accept a Messiah who was willing to be wrongly accused, convicted of crimes, beaten beyond recognition, stripped naked and crucified to death. So Jesus told Peter that he, as well as the others, must be willing to accept Jesus' humiliating foot washing as a symbol of His death for all of us.

Well, with that, Peter upped the ante and instead wanted a full bath! Once again, choosing his plan over Jesus' plan. But Jesus again clarified Peter's request by adding in verse 10 that a person who has already bathed doesn't need another complete cleansing. He merely needs a foot-washing....a touch up... so to speak.

Jesus' concern was not their hygiene, but their holiness. The symbolism here is this: Jesus does the initial and complete cleansing of our sin problem with His sacrifice on the Cross. Once we have accepted that cleansing, then our family in Christ holds us accountable for our walking out our faith on a daily basis. For that, we need each other to remind us that our feet are dirty. It's about our Christian witness, our walk with the Lord. Our dealings with others must be selfless and honest, our time, especially our leisure time must be spent wisely, our entertainment choices must be Godly, our deficiency in reaching out to others confronted. In other words, we do not walk alone on this Christian journey; we confess our sins to one another, so that we can be cleansed of all unrighteousness as we were reminded in 1 John 1:9. That is the foot-washing that Jesus spoke of when He told Peter that a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet.

And you are clean, Jesus continued in verse 11, well.....not all of you. Jesus exposed that there was a weak link among them, that of course, being Judas. Satan had probably been "cultivating" Judas for a long time. In 13:2, John noted that the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus, but Judas was waiting for the right moment. Jesus, of course, knew all of this. If we re-read 13-3, we see that the Father had put all things under Jesus' power, so Jesus, out of His great love for His own, gave Judas opportunities to reconsider; certainly the foot washing was one of them, but Judas was not moved to confess that he was the unclean one of the bunch. And it was clear that the disciples had not guessed which one it was. So Jesus tried again.

In verse 12, Jesus changed roles from servant to Teacher and sat down to explain what He had just done. There are three things going on here, let's look at all of them: Three ways to apply the Foot Washing

1. Our willingness to serve with acts of humility that are out of our comfort zone
2. Peter's problem in accepting the washing from Jesus
3. Our responsibility to hold others in the family of God accountable with a regular 'foot washing from the dirt of the world.'

1. Are we willing to serve others with acts of humility that are out of our comfort zone?

If Jesus, as the Teacher and Lord was willing to meet others' needs in a way that sacrifices His dignity and status, we must be willing to do the same for others. Are there some things that you are unwilling to do? Pick up trash when you see it outside? Clean up someone else's mess even if they don't know you did it? Walk the grocery cart back into the store? Let someone merge ahead

of you as you drive? Stop and talk to that person who is pushing the shopping cart and appears to be homeless?

Ask yourself, how have I gone out of my way to show the love of Christ to someone recently? We say that we are willing to serve God and others, but there are limits to how far we will really go. Most of us will do whatever is necessary to keep ourselves from feeling too guilty, but if it really requires us to leave our comfort zone, then we make excuses. Oswald Chambers said in *My Utmost for His Highest* (January 16), “As long as think about what I am fitted for, I shall never hear the call of God. The majority of us have no ear for anything except ourselves.”

## 2. Peter’s problem in accepting the washing by Jesus

The second issue some of us “Martha types” must address is being willing to be on the receiving end of others’ service. Is it more difficult for you to receive than to give? If we only serve, and are uncomfortable with being served, it can be a sign of deeply rooted and well-hidden pride. It shows up when we deny someone’s offer of help, by saying that we don’t need anything. But it may mean indicate that we have been unable to accept the Lord’s unconditional love and forgiveness. It’s far easier to work for our salvation with a checklist of rules that helps us to see how we’re measuring up. This was the root of Peter’s initial refusal to allow Jesus to wash his feet. True humility does not begin with the giving of service; true it begins with the readiness to receive from others when you know you are forgiven by God.

*Optional: We sometimes hear people talk about being able to forgive yourself for past sins....but there is nothing in the Bible about forgiving ourselves. Even that is something a person must DO. But what actually must occur is that we must for, perhaps the first time in our lives, accept the forgiveness of God for our sins completely....that’s grace, that’s humility in allowing Him to be the complete sacrifice for each one of us.*

## 3. We are responsible for each other’s ‘foot-washing’ within the Body of Christ.

As part of the Body of Christ, we cannot function as effectively when one part is hurting or weak. We need each other to remind us when we stray or to encourage us when we are growing. Is that what you do for each other in your small groups here or in your Sunday school class, life group, or with those at home? I’ve been in lots of small groups and I’ve not had many where we really hold each other accountable. I believe that in order to really grow in Christ and bond with each other, we need to ask and answer the hard questions such as

- What was the verse that God used to challenge you this week?
- What are you trusting Him for this week?
- What are you doing at this time in your life that requires faith in God?

As well as the in-depth and what do you think questions in our Bible study here, if we do not challenge each other beyond our comfort zone, we will continue to lack the intimacy with the Lord that most of us desire.

As Christians, we regularly pray for each other, but as we mature, we need to move beyond prayer regarding our circumstances, health issues, and favorable outcomes in the challenges we face. Do we not see our own spiritual immaturity? You've all lived through difficult circumstances; is there anything that God has not walked you through? Most of us at this stage of our Christian walk, should see our circumstances as the means through which God's will becomes clear. We pray not for the situation, but for growth though the circumstances. We should have the courage to ask each other for prayers that challenge our spiritual growth.

Such as this from Ephesians: Please pray for me that God would give me the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I may know His perfect love this week.

Or this from James: pray that I would have joy in my trials at work or at home so that I can develop the perseverance I need to be mature in Christ.

Or this from Philippians: Pray that my love would abound more in knowledge and depth of insight so that I may make decisions each minute that are pure and blameless.

When we pray like Paul prayed, circumstances become not the ends, but the means for how the Lord works out His will for our lives.

Finally, we need to confess our sins to each other. When we have failed, we need to admit it to someone who will remind us that temptations can be overcome, but that we are forgiven and loved regardless of our shortcomings.

Here are some practical ways to apply foot-washing in our walk, and we need to do it for each other as often as our feet get dirty!

Jesus did not wash the disciples' feet so that we could have foot-washing ceremonies each year during Holy Week. He said in verse 15 that He, as their Master-teacher, had set an example for them to follow. He was preparing them to care for each other when He would not be there to do so. Here's a heads up on the first question for next week....you'll be asked what touched your life in this week's lesson. Here's a review so that you can apply at least one of these to your own life:

Jesus took on the nature of a servant; be willing to sometimes serve others outside of your comfort zone.

If you have trouble receiving from others, be sure to ask yourself if you have really received the forgiveness of God for your sins.

In your small groups here or elsewhere, be tenacious in holding each other accountable with challenging questions, prayer for spiritual growth, and confession of sins.

The letter of James reminds us that if we hear what Jesus says, and then we just continue to everything the same say....we are deceiving ourselves. Actually, we are sinning. But Jesus goes for the positive in verse 17; He wants us to be happy as we serve others; He says to His disciples, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." But in verse 18, we see that Jesus knew that there would be no blessing for the one who had lifted his heel against Him.

To 'lift one's heel against' means that someone has taken cruel advantage in a time of vulnerability. To the eastern idea of hospitality, for the one who eats bread with you to lift up his heel against you would be a great betrayal and treachery. By announcing it in advance and connecting it to Psalm 41:9 as prophecy, Jesus wanted to make sure that His disciples did not see him as a victim of Judas' treachery. The betrayal of Jesus was no failure in judgment when Jesus selected Judas as one of the twelve.

"I say to you, one of you will betray Me" also shows that Jesus was not taken by surprise, but the disciples stared at each other in surprise. They had no suspicion of Judas, and even after he left, they thought he was on an errand for Jesus or a mission of mercy. They were all vulnerable and apparently thought any one of them was capable of treachery, and so are we. Think of this the next time you naively say that you don't need any prayer this week. We are all quite capable of the worst sin at the prompting of the world and of the enemy. To think otherwise is to not realize how much we owe to the grace of God each minute of our lives.

Jesus knew that it was Judas who would fulfill the words that David had spoken around 1000 years earlier of his own situation when his trusted advisor Ahithophel turned against his leadership. Everyone in the room knew the fate of Ahithophel, who hung himself when he realized that he had lifted up his heel against David. Jesus was troubled for Judas' sake, not His own. Jesus looked ahead and saw ahead the same despair that Judas would experience when he realized how he had failed.

The question arises regarding Judas being chosen to betray Jesus and therefore, not able to change his destiny. The Lord gives each of us free will, and although He is aware of what choices we will make, we are not programmed robots and we are able to make our own decisions in life. Jesus gave Judas several opportunities to confess and back out, and if Judas had, Jesus would have still gone to the cross by some other means.

So here, Jesus gave Judas one last chance by exposing Judas' betrayal to the others. Perhaps if the others knew, they would try to dissuade Judas. Certainly Peter would have spoken up or perhaps the others would not have let him leave the room. But even when Peter and John saw Jesus gave the dipped bread to Judas, like a toast, a mark of courtesy and esteem, they did not understand what was going on with him.

I've heard some people make an effort to justify Judas' action by saying that if he created a crisis, Jesus would be forced to bring in the Messianic kingdom when He was arrested. Or that he wanted to force the Pharisees to deal with who Jesus was without the crowds nearby to distract them. Neither of those speculations have any Scriptural justification, but even if they did, in both cases, Judas was not submitting to the will of Jesus or the Father. No, Judas wanted his own way; he was not ever a true disciple, but rather a hypocrite who deceived all eleven of those who were closest to him. He was willing to be served, to have his feet washed, but he would rather betray Jesus than to wash the feet of others. If he accepted Jesus offer at this time, he would have to stay and serve others. That was not his plan. When Judas accepted the morsel from the hand of Jesus, he rejected Jesus' last attempt to win him over, he refused Jesus' plan, and Jesus at that point relinquished control of Judas and left him in the darkness of enemy hands. 'Do it quickly', Jesus said and the wheels were put into motion for His arrest, trial and sentencing that would change the destiny of the entire human race.

But Jesus did not see Judas's betrayal as defeat; He turned to His Eleven and said, "NOW is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him." From Jesus' perspective, this was the beginning of the last part of His journey! With Judas now gone, the time clock is running and the obstacles removed. Jesus began His final discourse to His disciples which we will be studying in detail for the next five weeks. And it begins with the ending! Jesus saw the cross ahead, not in terms of humiliation, but instead for the glory of God about to be revealed.

This is how God the Father has chosen to share His divine life with the followers of His Son. It is the great irony that Dan spoke of last week when he shared how glory of God is on display when people trust Him with their suffering. But, of course, in order for that suffering on the cross to take place, Jesus had to leave them. He told them in verse 33, "My children, I will be with you only a little while longer...where I am going, you cannot come."

It was only a short while ago in chapter 11:16 that Thomas had bravely said to the rest of the disciples, 'Let us go also go so that we may die with Him.' when they prepared to return to Judea after Lazarus' death, so the disciples were aware of the danger of Jesus' being killed. But this time, when Jesus told them in that they would not be coming with Him, they were dismayed.

Think about the plight: For three years, Jesus had been their shepherd. When they needed their taxes paid, He got a fish and took their taxes out of its mouth. When they needed food, He



arranged it. When they needed truth, He taught it. When they needed comfort, He gave it. They had left everything to follow Jesus, and had staked their lives the belief that He was about to establish His kingdom. Each one expected to be a high-ranking official in the government when He took political control of Israel as Messiah, and now.....it was over..... He was leaving them?

And now they must rely on each other? Be each others' servants? Well, we saw how many of them were eager to jump up and wash feet! How would that work out?

The New Commandment that Jesus gave them in verse 34 was not really a new command; but it takes on a different dimension as a result of the Incarnation.

The new 'love' is not a feeling, or a law that has to be followed; rather it is the fruit of the love of the Father for the Son, which then manifested itself in the love of Jesus for the disciples which in turn would result in the disciples love for each other. The disciples, like the Master Jesus Himself, would now reveal the Father.

The Old Testament demanded that men should love their neighbors as themselves, under the New Covenant, the only way that the disciples would be able to survive without Jesus in a hostile world is if they loved each other better than themselves, were willing to serve each other, and were willing to die for each other. But knowing each other the way they did, the disciples had no illusions that their love for each other could even begin to replace what they had with Jesus.

"Lord, *where are you going?*" Peter demanded to know; he was determined that wherever Jesus was going, Peter did not want to be left behind. We recall that Peter had asked before, in chapter 6:68, "Lord, to whom will we go?"

Indeed, where else would they go now if Jesus is not the one they believed He was? Jesus encouraged Peter by saying that he would follow later, but Peter in a panic, demanded to know, "Lord, why can't I follow You now?" He was thinking, 'I'm devoted enough, I'm eager, I'm Your man.... Don't leave me here alone to serve these guys, to love them better than myself.....I'll' ....'I'll lay down my life for You!!!' He was speaking for himself, note he did not say, 'WE will lay down our lives for You.'

Can you relate to Peter at this point? I'll do anything....just don't leave me!!!

He would lay down his life for Jesus, but did not want to be left behind to serve others. He wanted his plan instead of Jesus' plan. And we know Peter's plan was a flawed one. Really Peter, you'll lay down your life? Before the night is over, you will completely embarrass yourself because right now, you are operating in your own strength, and in your own zeal, and in

your own pride. You don't know your own heart, you can't do it at this point.....you cannot lay down your life for Jesus, Peter, until Jesus first lays down His life for you and opens the way for you to come to the Father.

So we leave Peter and the other ten apostles in a quandary. They've just received a series of bombshells.

They are being called to serve one another, wash each others' feet, one of them is a betrayer, Jesus is going away and they can't follow this time, they have just been commanded to love each other whether they like each other or not, and Peter will disown Jesus before the next day. This was way out of their comfort zone! They would have preferred to be sheep for the rest of their lives, being cared for by others, being loved by Jesus, laying down their lives for Him, but not for each other. Aren't we much the same? We really don't want to leave our comfortable lives to do the hard things. But Jesus was leaving them no options. Their plans were about to change. Things looked very bleak for all of them. Jesus had just radically altered their lives three years ago when He called them to follow Him, and now in less than a day, they would all be shipwrecked, or that's what it looked like from this side of the cross.

But Jesus had a few more hours to teach them, to comfort them, to love them and to promise them that His words are not empty, that no betrayal, no denial, no confusion is permanent in the light of His glory. And aren't you glad that you know the rest of the story?

The disciples could not have anticipated what God had in store for them. The Resurrection would change everything. After that, it would be their turn to step out and follow His plan, humble themselves to serve others, to transfer their love for Jesus into love for each other, so that the Father could be glorified and truly revealed to the world.

Do you want the glory of God revealed in you? Then it can't be your plan. It must be His plan. We must move beyond our comfort zone to exactly what Jesus called His own to do: serve others, wash feet, move beyond ourselves to love, so that God's glory is revealed in us.

Conclude with prayer