

The Basin and the Towel

John 13:1-11

It is my great joy and privilege to minister the Word of God to you again, but this morning after being in the book of Revelation for a year and a half we are now going to switch gears for maybe a couple of months. I am going to do a topical series on the heart of love which will include a number of different passages that we will look at exegetically.

And this morning we are going to, in a few minutes, look at John chapter 13, but before we do may I remind you that if we look at the first century Church, if we go back to Acts 11, for example, there we discover that the first Gentile Church was established in Antioch, Syria. And, according to the text we read in verse 26 of that passage that it was at that time that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

Now, you must know that that was a term of derision. That was a term of contempt. People despised Christians and it literally meant of the part of Christ or little Christs. The world hated genuine Christians then as they hate genuine Christians today. In fact, Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:16, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.”¹

The hatred for genuine Christians remains strong today as ever and I might add that if the world does not hate you, there is something wrong with your Christianity. For this reason John tells us in 1 John three and verse 13, “Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you.”² And then he goes on to make this profound statement concerning one of several marks of a true Christian, this characteristic that really proves a person is a little Christ, proves that a person is born again, proves what kind of person the world will despise.

He says, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren.”³ In other words, we love other members of the body of Christ. We love those in our church family. He goes on to say, “He who does not love abides in death.”⁴ In other words, if that is not the pattern of your life, you are not a believer. It is real simple.

In chapter four and verse seven he goes on to say:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.⁵

And then in verse 11 he says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”⁶

¹ 1 Peter 4:16.

² 1 John 3:13.

³ 1 John 3:14.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 1 John 4:7-8.

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It is easy for us to hear that and to say, “Well, fortunately I think I score rather highly on the love test.” Really? I fear I don’t. Let me give you a mere sampling of some of the things the Lord would have us to love one another. This is a list from the New Testament commands that I like to call the “one another passages.” And we are going to examine these, every one, very closely in the weeks to come. But this is what loving one another truly looks like.

We are to accept one another, admonish one another, bear one another’s burdens of sin, bear with one another, build up one another, care for one another, comfort one another, confess our sins to one another, pray for one another, be devoted to one another, encourage one another, be kind, tenderhearted and forgive one another, be honest with one another, prefer one another in honor, be hospitable to one another, pay our financial obligations to one another, celebrate the unified diversity of being members of one another, be of the same mind with one another, serve one another, show regard for one another, stimulate and encourage one another to love and good deeds and corporate worship and submit to one another.

In Mark 12 the Lord Jesus said that the foremost commandment of all is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And he went on to say the second is this. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” He even commands us in Matthew 5:44 to love our enemies. He says, “Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” You see, this is the very opposite of our go ahead and make my day type of attitude that we have in our culture, this attitude of I have my rights. How dare you treat me that way? I am going to get even.

Over the next several weeks I have been compelled by the Holy Spirit to address this issue of loving one another. And I want to preface all of his by saying, “There is an enormous amount of love in this church.” I see it all the time. All you have to do is look. You will see it. But I would also add there is still room for improvement.

I have noticed that there are pockets of broken fellowship where some of you are not on speaking terms. Instead of loving one another you avoid one another. You are keeping a record of wrongs. You are harboring bitterness in your heart. Some of you are very easily offended, especially over issues pertaining to your children or over musical styles. Some of you have equally offended others by your behaviors. And many times it is because your children are undisciplined. But you see only the speck in your brother’s eye. You don’t see the log in your own.

Some merely tolerate certain members of the Church family. But you don’t really love them. In fact, it would appear that for some of you, you harbor some kind of a secret resentment towards certain people that many times comes out in subtle forms of gossip. And, unfortunately, I fear that you can become too angry to seek reconciliation and too proud to forgive. There are little cliques that have developed within the church especially

⁶ 1 John 4:11.

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among some of the ladies. Perhaps it is unintentional, but there are those who feel alienated in the body. Some of you feel superior to others and it comes out in a very unique way. There is a sense in which you demand that your personal preferences be elevated above everybody else. And some of you just stay to yourselves. You live as though you are in isolation. It is like we have a family downstairs meeting together and fellowshiping together and enjoying one another, but you stay up in the attic for some reason. Or you just kind of stay outside and every now and then look in the window because you don't ever really get involved. Sometimes it is as though you have no desire to even know one another much less love one another.

And here is the danger, dear friends. If you fall into these categories, what is going to happen is you are going to forfeit blessing in your life. You are going to grieve the Spirit of God in your life. You are going to quench the Spirit of God in your life. You are even going to subject yourself to divine chastening. The church will lose its testimony. The church will lose its power. You will lose your power. And the Lord will be dishonored.

And all of these things, frankly, are a perpetual grief to my heart as a pastor. You must understand, because of my love for you and for Christ, I have got to call you to repentance. And over the next couple of months that will be the passion of my heart as I speak to you on this topic, "The heart of love." In fact, I was thinking of Paul's concern for the believers at Galatia and there he said that he labored in pain until Christ is formed in you.

Now in light of this I want to begin our study by having you turn to Ephesians chapter four, ok? This will be more of a Bible study at first and then it will become more of an expositional sermon as you will see. In Ephesians chapter four beginning in verse 11 we read, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers."⁷ That can literally be translated, "teaching shepherds."

And why did he do this? Why has he given these men to the church of which I would be one by God's grace? Verse 12 tells us. "For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ."⁸ The word "equip" comes from a Greek term **KATARTISMOS** (kat-ar-tis-mos') and it means to perfect or to restore or to make complete. It was even a medical term that was used to describe the setting of a broken bone. So it is something that must be done in order for the bone to heal properly, but it must be done tenderly, with great care, but it must be done forcefully. In fact, the term is also used to describe in Scripture the mending of a net.

So, in other words, what I am to help you do is be made complete. It says, "For the equipping of the saints."⁹ And the equipping of the saints is for the work of service.

In other words, as I do this, the purpose is to help teach you how to serve each other more effectively. And this is something for every saint, not just a few. And it says, "To the

⁷ Ephesians 4:11.

⁸ Ephesians 4:12.

⁹ Ibid.

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building up of the body of Christ.”¹⁰ “Building up” in the original language literally is a term that means to build a house. It could be translated, “For the edification of the body of Christ.” So, in other words, all of this is for the purpose of promoting your spiritual growth. So this is my job description, to teach you the Word of God so that you can be equipped to serve each other more effectively and to grow to be more like Christ.

He goes on to say, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”¹¹ Well, what is this unity of the faith to which we are to attain? It literally is referring to the body of Christian truth, Bible doctrine. That is where we need to be united. That is the faith that this is describing. Do you see? Without unity of doctrine and without—as the next phrase says—the knowledge of the Son of God, which is a reference to having a correct, accurate, comprehensive understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ, without those two things there will be no maturity and there will be no unity in the Church.

In fact, the chaos that was going on in Corinth is a great example of that. You will remember in 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul says to the Church at Corinth, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete.”¹² There is the same word as equipped. That you be perfected here, “that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”¹³

Now, if you go back to Ephesians four the reason here is in verse 14. “As a result...” In other words, when the pastor teacher is equipping you as he should and you are being obedient to these things, “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.”¹⁴

Many churches today quite frankly are like child centered homes. You all know what a child centered home is where you have one or two children that are absolutely undisciplined. They are spoiled and they dominate the entire family. And the parents just kind of orbit around those children. Many churches are that way. The whole church orbits around a few immature, ignorant, gullible, undisciplined little children. While the pastor is always running for cover shouting, “I am going to count to 10.”

I was reminded when I was thinking of this the other day of a young pastor that I was mentoring several years back and he was talking about this church that he was in and there was what he called a matriarch in the church, a woman who was kind of the dominant person in the church and he told me horror stories of how this woman would get mad and throw hymnals at people and chase them around the church with a magazine,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ephesians 4:13.

¹² 1 Corinthians 1:10.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:14.

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sometimes with an umbrella. And he asked me, “Have you ever had that in your church?” And I had to laugh. I said, “No. And that will never happen in this church.” But you would be surprised how many churches that does happen in.

He asked me what I should do and I said, “It is very simple.” I began to walk him through the process of Church discipline, of confronting someone and so forth. Well, to make a long story short, he began that process and in a very short period of time the church kicked him out of the church. And I told him that that was a profound demonstration of God’s grace in your life because you did not have a church, you were in with a pack of wolves. Interestingly enough, that church gets rid of a pastor on the average of every two years and that has been the process for about 25 years. You see, inevitably, churches that tolerate this kind of chaos are easy prey for predatory preachers, for false teachers. They are not loving as Christ loved the Church. They have no power. They have no testimony. That must not happen here.

So it is the role of the pastor teacher to remedy that problem through doctrinal preaching, through application, through discipline that we might all be unified in our understanding of biblical doctrinal truth and our understanding of who Christ is, how he functions and, therefore, how we are to imitate him. So, in light of this, in verse 15, back to Ephesians four, he says, “But speaking the truth to you in love.”¹⁵ I am to speak the truth to you in love, ok? “We are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”¹⁶ For it is Christ, according to verse 16, that “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”¹⁷

So, in other words, there needs to be both an individual as well as a collective equipping that must take place in the Church. And this is primarily the responsibility of the pastor teacher and then the other elders that come along beside him. And especially here in the context of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. This equipping centered around the characteristics of a worthy walk with Christ. Will you notice verse one of chapter four? He says, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”¹⁸

Very briefly, when he says, “I, therefore...” he is saying, “In light of the first three chapters of this letter, in light of what I have been telling you whereby I have set forth the believer’s position in Christ that includes all of the blessings and the honors and the privileges of being a child of God, in light of all of this, now, I am going to entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,” the call there referring to the Lord’s sovereign, effectual call to salvation.

So he is saying, “In light of all of these positional truths... so you understand your position in Christ. I am now going to entreat you to live consistently with some practical truths that demonstrate your love for Christ that is worthy of our salvation.” And he

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:15.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ephesians 4:16.

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:1.

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basically gives five essentials. I am not going to exposit them now, but notice them, each of them being an attitude that is progressive, building one upon each upon the other.

He said:

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.¹⁹

And then he continues in verses seven through 11 to describe the unique gifts that Christ has given to his Church to produce these virtues in the members of the body of Christ, verse 11. He talks about giving the apostles and the prophets. Then later on in the New Testament period the evangelists and now the pastor teachers as well.

And so here we have a profound emphasis, dear friends, on the importance of being Christ like, of having a worthy walk, of having even your pastor teacher equip you individually and corporately so that you come to the unity of the faith. In other words, you understand sound doctrine and the knowledge of the Son of God, again, so that you will have an accurate, comprehensive understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ which will then produce Christ like spiritual maturity and discernment and therefore unity and love in the body of Christ.

In verse 16 he says, “The growth of the body for the building up of itself in...”²⁰ what? In love. And to this end in verses 31 and 32 he says:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.²¹

And then in the very first verse of chapter five he said, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us.”²² So with that as an introduction today we begin a series called, “The heart of love.”

We are going to start by examining very closely love’s supreme example, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I have entitled my discourse to you this morning, “The basin and the towel,” which will become exceedingly obvious in a few moments.

So turn to John 13 that we have read just a few minutes earlier in our Scripture reading. Let me give you some very important context here. This is a very pivotal chapter in John’s gospel. There is a shift here that is going on away from the Lord’s public ministry. He has gone to Israel primarily to his own people. They have utterly rejected

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:2-3.

²⁰ Ephesians 4:16.

²¹ Ephesians 4:32-32.

²² Ephesians 5:1-2.

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him. And so now we see him moving into a more private ministry focusing primarily on his disciples and chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 are really a teaching farewell address that he gives to them. And the dominant topic is love. And this leads up to his arrest and his crucifixion in chapters 18 and 19 which is the supreme example of love.

So here in John 13 in these first 17 verses we are going to see that love requires three things. And I am sure it requires much more, but I want to just focus on at least these three things that flow from this text: number one, self sacrifice; number two, self humiliation; and, number three, self control.

By further context, as we study the gospel account we see that although Jesus by now has described his impending death on several occasions, which is the ultimate sacrifice, the disciples just could not to grips with it. Isn't it easy how we can believe what we want to believe. In spite of all of the evidence to the contrary, we believe what we want to believe. And so instead of focusing on the Lord's death, they are preoccupied with who is going to be greatest in the kingdom.

You see, they thought that the messianic rule was about to take place, that Rome was going to be defeated, that the glorious messianic age that thousand year reign was going to be inaugurated and they were so excited about that. That was all they could think about. That is why Judas kept hanging around. He was the original prosperity theologian. He wanted to cash in on Christ. When he finally saw that that wasn't going to happen, he bailed. So there was this undercurrent of rivalry that is building among the 12 disciples. And although Jesus had instructed them about humility, for example, back in Matthew 18, in Matthew 20 you will recall that James and John and their mother all asked Jesus to give them a place of prominence in the kingdom.

Remember, she was wanting one on the right and one on the left. This is the attitude. And we see that this kind of ambitious pride was recurring constantly among the disciples right up to the Last Supper that we read about here in John 13. In Luke 22 verse 24 we read, "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest."²³

Now there is a recipe for disaster. Obviously they had much to learn about Christ like love. So Jesus is about to teach them a profound lesson in humility and love, first at the Last Supper and secondly and most profoundly on the cross of Calvary the next day. Now, it is also important to bear in mind that Jesus was fully aware that Judas had already made arrangements to betray him. He knew that the inconceivable tortures of his suffering and his death were about to begin.

Put yourself in that place. What would be the preoccupation of your mind, others or yourself? He focused on those that he loved. And, beloved, herein is our example of love. And this brings me to my first point that I want you to see. Love's supreme example manifests itself, number one, through self-sacrifice.

²³ Luke 22:24.

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In verse one it says, “Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”²⁴ Imagine what was going on in Jesus’ heart. His soul was in anguish. He was filled with a comprehensive knowledge of all that was about to happen to him. He was about to be betrayed by one who had walked with him over the last three years. He also knew that even Peter, the leader, was going to deny him that night three times. He knew that his own countrymen who had shouted just a few days before, “Hosanna to the Son of David,”²⁵ are now about to cry, “Crucify him.”

And how his self-centered disciples are bickering over who is going to be greatest in the kingdom. Inconceivable! What would you do? Well, what I would do is I would slam my fist down on the table and say, “That is it. That is enough. I am out of here. I want nothing to do with any of you anymore. I am going to leave this church. I am going to find one that shows me a little respect.” That is what we do, right?

That is not what Jesus did. You see, he came to seek and to save sinners. He came to do the will of the Father. He was the Passover Lamb. He was going to a cross. This magnificent picture of redemption that began at the Passover in Egypt where blood was sprinkled on a door post would now be completed when innocent blood would be spilt upon a cross. At the end of verse one it says, “Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”²⁶ **EIS TELOS** (ice tel’-os) in Greek. It means to the fullest extent. It means eternally. It could be translated “to the uttermost.” You see, the point is his love has no limits towards those whom the Father has given to him.

Beloved, here is our example of love. Grasp this now. Christ like love ignores offence. It transcends betrayal. It looks beyond the sins of others and it is preoccupied solely with glorifying the Father, regardless of whether or not someone reciprocates or responds in love in return. It is preoccupied with sacrifice, not revenge. It seeks the highest good for those who least deserve it. And this kind of love never demands any payment. And hear this. This kind of love is an act of the will. It has nothing to do with emotions. This kind of love requires self-sacrifice. Husbands, we are told to love our wives as Christ loved the Church and what? Gave himself up for her. This is the idea.

But, secondly, Christ like love requires self-humiliation. Notice verse two. It says, “And during supper...” Then I want you to skip down to the first part of verse four. It says that Jesus rose from supper. And in between we are going to see what is going on in his mind. So follow closely as I explain this.

It says, “And during supper...” It could be better translated, “When supper was come.” It was part of the early meal here. The scene is one of many preparations. And when supper was come, “the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son

²⁴ John 13:1.

²⁵ Matthew 21:15.

²⁶ John 13:1.

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of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus...”²⁷ And, again now, this is his mindset. “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God,”²⁸ in light of all of that he rose from supper.

And so in other words what is being said here is Jesus knew full well about the betrayal. He knew that Satan was about to enter into Judas. He knew that his horrible crucifixion was set into motion. But along with that, he knew full well the final outcome of his atoning work on the cross. He knew of his glorious ascension back to the right hand of the Father. Nevertheless, in light of all of that, despite the infinite glory of his person and his work, wherein he could have been legitimately proud, where he could have legitimately exalted himself, notice what he does, verse four.

He rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.²⁹

This is inconceivable. This is such an amazing scene.

Bear in mind that it was common in those days—and, frankly, at some level it has been common in our household—for mealtime to be one of the best teaching times. Do you notice that maybe in your home? And certainly that was true with the rabbis at those days. And so the Lord is about to teach them a lesson that they would never forget.

Now, we must understand the culture here because some of this is foreign to us. Feet were always filthy dirty. The disciples now had come from Bethany. They had traveled a number of miles. You are wearing sandals, basically. And if you have been in that part of the world where people continue to go barefoot or to wear sandals, you will see how dirty feet can be. So it was customary for a host to have a slave wash the feet of the guests that enter into the house. This was a sign of hospitality. And at some level we do something similar. If you come over to the house to eat and you have been out working in the fields or whatever, we would say, “Hey, if you want to clean up, the rest room is down, you know, the way and there is soap and towel and so forth.” It is the same type of thing.

But it was also a matter of personal hygiene, especially when you are going to eat because the way they would eat would be to have either pillows or small little couches whereby they would recline and their heads would be towards the center, sometimes of a small table, a very small table, or sometimes they would just eat off the floor. And then their feet would be to the outer edge. But your feet would always be kind of around your neighbor at some level. So it would be very unappetizing to eat with those kinds of dirty feet. Nobody would like that.

²⁷ John 13:2-3.

²⁸ John 13:3.

²⁹ John 13:4-5.

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So the washing now was very important in the culture even for personal hygiene. But I might also add that historically we know that this kind of washing was performed by the lowliest slave. This was the job that nobody wanted. And it was never done by a rabbi, ever. This was a complete violation, therefore, of all of the cultural mores of that day for Jesus to do what he is doing.

But now will you remember that there was some secrecy regarding finding the room. I won't get into all of that detail, but the Lord wanted to keep some of that from Judas so that he wouldn't be betrayed prematurely. But there were provisions that were made in that upper room that they rented. The proper preparations were made for a passover meal. And obviously there was no slave here. No slave to do the washing of the feet. And certainly none of the bickering disciples are going to lower themselves to do such a humiliating task. So everyone is making preparations to eat with dirty feet, perhaps expecting somebody else to do the washing. But I am not going to do it.

But then will you notice closely the text? We see here that they all get settled in to eat. It says here that during supper or, again, the idea here is as supper was come, as it was ready to begin here we see that they have all settled in to eat. They have now demonstrated that no one was going to assume the servile role. And in verse four we read that Jesus got up.

You see, Jesus gave them—as we would say in our culture—plenty of rope to hang themselves. Now their intentions were well documented. They were all in a reclining position ready to eat. And at that point Jesus rose up. Nobody could have said, “Oh, no, wait. I was going to do that.” No, you have already played your hand. Jesus rose up.

Now it doesn't say this in the text, but I believe—and, again this is pure conjecture—but I believe that a pregnant silence fell over that room. The disciples were suddenly stunned and utterly humiliated. I believe their faces were flush with embarrassment and guilt. You see, now their selfishness was painfully exposed. Now the Lord of glory, the Son of the living God, the one who had performed countless miracles in their presence, the one who had calmed the sea, the one who had caused Peter to walk on water now suddenly the creator of the universe rises.

Suddenly Jesus begins to remove his outer garments in preparation to assume the most lowly position in the room and wash their feet. Verse four says he “rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about,”³⁰ which literally means that he wrapped a large towel around him tightly.

Let me give you the scene here. What they would do and what they still do in many of those cultures is if you are going to wash the feet, especially the feet of 12, you are going to take off your nice clothes. You want to take them off so you don't get the mud from the water and all on them. And so literally what they would do and what Jesus did is he took off his outer garment and stripped down to what we would call his undergarments and laid them aside so they wouldn't get dirty and he took the towel and it would be their

³⁰ John 13:4.

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long towels. And he would wrap that around him. Sometimes they would tie them so that he could kneel down to begin the process of washing the feet knowing that some of the water which would become muddy very quickly is going to splatter on him. And it is much easier to take the towel and wash it off of your arms and your chest and your legs than it would be if you got it on your good garments. So this is what is happening.

And will you notice something else? The basin and the towel had been there all along. Do you see that? The proper preparations had been made. There was no one looking around for the basin and the towel and saying, “You know, we need something here to clean our feet.” No, it is already there. But pride is too self absorbed to see the needs of others, isn’t it? But now I believe that these men stared at that water basin that they had previously ignored. No one, I am sure, said a word which, frankly, is the proper response to profound conviction.

As I think about it, what must have the angels thought as they looked upon them? The one who is most holy assumes the role of the most lowly servant and washes the feet of those who are least holy? Even Judas the enemy that is betraying him? Beloved, what an example of loving your enemies. Don’t you see the profound significance of this astounding theme?

It says, “[He] laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about.”³¹ Where else have you heard that? In Philippians chapter two verse five we read:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.³²

You see, dear friends, here the Lord is giving a living illustration of humility and what is about to happen on the cross.

My friend, you may be a legend in your own mind and think that you are too important to serve others. But in comparison to the Lord of glory you and I are nothing. Even as life cannot exist without water, love cannot exist without humility. And what a picture this is of loving to the end, to the fullest extent. Again, keep this in mind. His was a love that remained focused on his own. And even while hanging on a cross the next day bearing the sins of those who believe he still reached out to a thief. This is what it means to love to the end. And it is this love that motivates not only his washing of the disciples’ feet, but also his farewell address that follows in the next several chapters.

In fact, in verse 34 of chapter 13 he says:

³¹ Ibid.

³² Philippians 2:5-8.

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A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.³³

Again, later on, at the conclusion of his high priestly prayer in the garden in John 17 verse 26 Jesus says to the Father, “I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them.”³⁴

You see, before the brutality of his trial and the tortures of the cross, Jesus prays for us, praying specifically for the disciples at that time that they will know God. Because, you see, you cannot love a God that you do not know nor can you reciprocate with a love that you have never known. He wants us to experience the love wherewith the Father loves him. And by grace we can and we do and by grace, therefore, we are able to be obedient to the command that the Lord gives to love one another, that by this all men will know that you are my disciples.

You see, the more we love the unlovable, the more we mirror Christ, right? The next time you are offended, rather than throwing a child like tantrum, why don't you assume the role of a servant and seek some way to wash your brother's feet? Because Christ like love requires self sacrifice and it requires self humiliation.

But, thirdly, it require self control. Notice verse six. “And so He came to Simon Peter.”³⁵ Let's pause there for a second. I believe that by now Simon Peter is sobbing almost uncontrollably. “He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, ‘Lord, do You wash my feet?’”³⁶

You see, Peter is exposed now, isn't he? They are all exposed. He is embarrassed. He is obviously confused. He loves the Lord and he couldn't imagine him stooping so low. The grammar of the original language helps us see this in the emphatic use of the pronouns in his reaction. He says, “Lord, *you* are washing *my* feet?” You see, again, he is humiliated. He is embarrassed. He is confused. He is shocked. He is absolutely overwhelmed.

Then, even after the Lord's explanation, we notice that Peter responds negatively. And I don't believe he is responding indignantly here. In verse eight he says, “Never shall You wash my feet!”³⁷ To which Jesus replied. “Fine. You pig headed fool. You ignorant little man. I am so sick of you. I am out of here. I have had it with you. I want nothing more to do with you. What is the matter with you? I have loved you in these ways. I am trying to teach you these things and look how you treat me.”

³³ John 34:13-14.

³⁴ John 17:26.

³⁵ John 13:6.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John 13:8.

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Obviously Jesus didn't do that because love requires self-control. It requires, dear friends, catch it, patience. It requires gentleness. It requires discipline, restraint, power under control. And we see this in the Lord's patient controlled response to Peter's embarrassment and defensiveness, not to mention his continued theological ignorance, one that was fueled by his self-seeking pride. Because, again, we want to believe theologically what elevates us the most. And so he didn't want to believe that Jesus was really going to die. He didn't want to hear that. What he wanted to believe is that Jesus was going to destroy Rome and establish the kingdom and he was looking for his spot like all of the rest.

But love is patient. Verse seven. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.'"³⁸ In other words, Jesus was thinking, "Peter I know that you are still blinded by your pride. You don't want to hear that tomorrow I am going to die as the sacrificial Lamb. I even know that you are going to deny me tonight three times. But after your denial and after my work on the cross is finished and after the Holy Spirit comes upon you at Pentecost, then you will understand."

Beloved, this is such an important message for you to hear. This is such an important lesson. Christ-like love requires self-control. More often than not when we try to truly love someone in a tangible way, they don't respond the way we wish they would, do they? They don't reciprocate. They don't say, "Oh, thank you so much. Please forgive me. Let's reconcile and let's start living consistently with all these glorious truths, et cetera." No, they typically don't respond that way. And then it is our tendency to become frustrated and that frustration exposes something. Do you know what it is? Your selfish motivation.

I've talked with people in counseling before and explained to them how they need to love through example a wayward spouse that is mistreating them and explain what that might look like in their particular context. And they go and do it and their spouse doesn't respond and they come back and say, "It didn't work." "What do you mean it didn't work?" "Well, they... I did what you said and they are still mistreating me."

You see, they missed the whole point, because this kind of love has no conditions. You see, we love others first to give glory to God. With no demand, it is a great desire, but never a demand that they in any way reciprocate with love or with understanding. We must patiently wait on the Lord for him to do his great and glorious work in the life of that person. That is his role. This requires self-control. It requires a settled patience that waits on the Holy Spirit to do what he will do in his time. You see, our responsibility is to simply keep loving and keep forgiving, keep speaking that truth in love and so forth.

Well, obviously Peter is overwhelmed. He just didn't get it and I believe in between sobs, verse eight: "Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.'"³⁹ Now here Jesus is going to

³⁸ John 13:7.

³⁹ John 13:8.

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digress very briefly from his object lesson on love and going to use Peter's confusion as a teachable moment to teach him a very important piece of theology.

He says, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."⁴⁰ Verse nine.

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."⁴¹

You see, here Jesus is making the distinction between the one time cleansing that must occur in our justification and the daily cleansing that needs to occur in our sanctification. You see, at salvation we are declared righteous. We have been washed completely by the blood of the Lamb. That is a washing that never needs to be repeated. That is why in verse 10 he says, "Peter, you are completely clean." But there is also a practical daily cleansing that needs to take place in our process of sanctification, the repentance of ongoing sin that we are aware of.

In Ephesians five and verse 26 Paul says that Christ sanctified, literally cleanses or purifies us, by the washing of water in the word, literally the spoken word. And you will recall that Jesus at the end of his high priestly prayer in John 17 and verse 17 says, "Sanctify them in truth. Thy Word is truth."⁴²

So remember. The agent of regeneration, of making us born again, is the Spirit. And the instrument of our cleansing is going to be the Word of God. So as we walk through life we accumulate the dirt of sin on our feet, but we don't lose our salvation. We don't need to be bathed again with our whole body. We just need to have our feet washed. 1 John 1:8, writing to believers John says this.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.⁴³

So the Lord is saying, "Peter, you don't need another bath here of regeneration, of justification. You are clean there. You just need to have the cleansing of daily sin, your sanctification."

And I find it interesting, again, notice the Lord's love even for his enemy Judas. Not only does he wash Judas' feet, but he also offers him one final invitation to come and be

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ John 13:9-11.

⁴² John 17:17.

⁴³ 1 John 1:8-9.

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cleansed from sin. In verse 11 he is speaking here to the one betraying him. “Not all of you are clean.”⁴⁴ It is as if he is saying, “Judas, do you hear me?” But, like some of you, Judas chose to spurn the love of God, a choice that will forever damn him.

So Jesus finishes the washing ceremony. He rises from his kneeling position. He wipes the splattered mud off of his skin. He gets dressed once again. And I believe then he sits back down to 11 sobbing, humiliated disciples and one who despised him.

Notice in verse 12 he says:

And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."⁴⁵

Now you might say, “Pastor, we need to start literally washing each other’s feet around here. We need to have regular foot washing ceremonies.” No, be very careful with that. I believe that that would not only miss Jesus’ lesson of humility, but it would violate what the text is telling us here. You see, this is not an ordinance like communion and baptism. This is an example of humility.

In verse 15, which is really the key to understanding this he says, “For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.”⁴⁶ You see, the example is that of self-humiliation, not washing feet. He didn’t say do what or that which I have done. If so, that would be an ordinance and we would need to obey that on some kind of regular basis. But rather he said, “Do as I did to you.” In other words, on your own accord, demonstrate this kind of self-humiliating love to one another.

We want to be very careful not to reduce this magnificent example of humility that we are to live out in our daily walk and turn it into a ritual, frankly, a ritual that has absolutely no significance in our culture. It even runs the risk of fueling our pride, doesn’t it? How easy it would be to start washing each other’s feet and think, “Boy, I am glad I am like Jesus.” You see, Jesus’ whole point was for them and for us to develop a heart that seeks opportunities to serve and to love even in menial ways. Beloved, we need to learn to look for the basin and the towel.

Verses 34 and 35 he says, “A new commandment I give to you.”⁴⁷ And he doesn’t say, “You need to start washing each other’s feet.” He says, “That you love one another, even

⁴⁴ John 13:11.

⁴⁵ John 13:12-17.

⁴⁶ John 13:15.

⁴⁷ John 13:34.

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as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁴⁸ So to demonstrate a love like Christ we must manifest self-sacrifice, self-humiliation and self-control.

In closing, can I challenge you here just for moment? The next time you are offended—and you will be, because we are all filled with pride. We are all a bunch of sinners. We are going to fail each other. But the next time you are offended and you are tempted to be bitter towards your brother, won't you recognize that is God's gift to you to give you an opportunity to learn how to love?

And the next time something doesn't go the way you wish it would in your marriage or in your family or in your church and you decide to break fellowship or show out with some kind of childish protest, can I ask you to look for the basin and the towel instead? And the next time you see your brother in need, don't look the other way and expect somebody else less important or less busy than you to serve him. Won't you be the one to lay aside your garment and assume the role of a servant?

Beloved, when the world sees this kind of love, don't you see, they are absolutely blown away with the power of the gospel? If you want to be serious about evangelism, this is where you have to begin. You have to begin by examining your own heart. Am I one that demonstrates self-sacrifice, self-humiliation and self-control? Because here and here only will you find lasting exhilarating joy in Christ. That is why he says in verse 17, “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”⁴⁹

If you want to be happy in the Lord, this is where you begin. Won't you examine your heart even today?

Let's pray together.

Father, cause these things to become a reality in us by the power of your Spirit and for your glory and for our joy I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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⁴⁸ John 13:34-35.

⁴⁹ John 13:17.