

## JESUS' EXAMPLE

John 13:1-17

Key Verse: 13:15

“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Chapters 13-17 of John's gospel are often called the upper room dialogues. They are conversations between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus teaches them many things, including his love, the hope of the kingdom of God, the work of the Holy Spirit, and his prayer. To study these chapters is to have an intimate conversation with Jesus. In today's passage Jesus washes his disciples' feet to show them his love. Then Jesus tells them to wash one another's feet, following his example. May God help us to understand this event and follow Jesus' example.

First, Jesus showed them the full extent of his love (1).

Look at verse 1. “It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.” From chapter one, John the Baptist cried out about Jesus, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” It pointed to Jesus' divine destiny at the cross. Now the time had come. It was just hours before Jesus would be arrested and tried and go to Calvary. What did Jesus do? He showed his disciples the full extent of his love. Actually, Jesus had loved them deeply from the beginning. Jesus had called them from ordinary lives to be his servants. Jesus planted hope in them to be great men of God in his world salvation work. Jesus had also loved them by being with them. For people to live together with others is not easy. Many who seem to

be saints at church are much different at home. Jesus is the holy God. Yet he lived with his disciples day in and day out, enduring their sins and weaknesses with gentle forbearance. Jesus loved them most by teaching them the word of God. The word of God cleansed their hearts and their minds. The nobility of God's own character began to grow in them. It was a miracle, like Jesus changing ordinary wash water into delicious wine. Moreover, Jesus taught them a sense of responsibility as leaders. Jesus taught them faith that overcomes storms. Jesus taught them resurrection faith. Their three years of divine discipline under Jesus had been intense, but they were growing as leaders who would change the world.

It seems that Jesus had done enough for his disciples. However, they did not yet know the full measure of Jesus' love. And they had not learned how to love one another. So Jesus wanted to show them the full extent of his love. Jesus' love is God's love. God's love is different from human love. Human love is conditional. One lady vowed at her wedding to love her husband, till death would they part. A few years later she said, "I just don't love you anymore," and separated. God's love is unconditional. God's love does not depend on our condition. God loves us when we are doing well, and God loves us just the same when we are not doing well. God's love is steady and unchanging because it comes from God, who is in very nature love. God's love is also everlasting. Psalm 136 repeats 26 times, "His love endures forever." God never gets tired in loving people. Many parents are too tired after work to love their children. Many shepherds feel "burned out" from loving their sheep. But our God never burns out. God's love endures forever.

Jesus showed his disciples the full extent of his love. Jesus did not just talk about love. Jesus showed them his love. Jesus performed a dramatic act that planted in their minds and hearts a vivid image of his love. Let's think about what Jesus did.

Second, Almighty Jesus humbly serves his disciples (2-5).

Look at verse 2. “The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” This was the Passover, and it was the last meal Jesus would eat with his disciples. They were in a private upper room all by themselves. The disciples were happy as the plates of hot bread and roasted lamb were served. They were happy to be with Jesus. However, there was an uninvited guest present. It was the devil. The devil came in with Judas Iscariot. The devil and Judas had formed a relationship through long conversations together. When following Jesus became difficult, the devil persuaded Judas to find an easier way. When following Jesus required suffering loss, the devil persuaded Judas to find a more profitable way. As the devil’s thoughts danced in his mind, Judas began to rehearse how he might betray Jesus. Finally, he was captured by the devil, and ready to do his bidding. Judas’ problem was that he did not respect Jesus’ word absolutely. Judas did not accept Jesus’ love. We must know that the devil is real. The devil roams around to capture all those who are relativistic toward Jesus’ word.

Jesus was well aware of the devil’s presence. But Jesus was not worried. Look at verse 3. “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God...” Jesus’ mind was occupied with thoughts of God. Jesus knew that Almighty God had entrusted his world salvation work completely into his hand. With this awesome power of God, Jesus was free to do what he wanted. If Jesus commanded a legion of angels to come down, they would destroy his enemies in the twinkling of an eye. If Jesus had asked Peter and

James to deal with Judas' betrayal, they might have taken him out for a lesson. What did Jesus do with his almighty power?

Look at verses 4-5. "...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Jesus used his almighty power to serve his disciples by washing their feet. This job was usually given to lowest servant in the house. In order to serve his disciples, Jesus humbled himself to the lowest place. Here we learn Jesus' serving character and divine humbleness. Paul describes Jesus in Philippians 2:6-8 as follows: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

In light of this passage, we learn that the one thing Jesus really wants us to know is that he loves us. He loves us so much that he humbled himself from the highest place to the very lowest to serve us in the way that we needed. We could never ascend to him. But he came to us, humbling himself. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." We must simply accept Jesus' love and humble service.

Third, the spiritual meaning of foot washing (6-11).

As Jesus went around washing the feet of the disciples, he came to Simon Peter. Peter said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" It was hard for Peter to accept.

Peter had a strong idea of a human power hierarchy. In this hierarchy, the one on top orders his subordinates to do this and do that. The subordinates order their subordinates until the person on the bottom ends up doing the dirty work. Peter might have thought that Bart should have washed everybody's feet. When his Lord Jesus took the position of the lowest servant to wash his feet, Peter was utterly shocked. It turned Peter's world view upside down.

Jesus knew it was hard for Peter to accept. So Jesus said, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Jesus wanted Peter to trust him and accept his washing. We can do this when we have a right attitude toward Jesus. In the army they use the phrase, "need to know basis." Soldiers are told as much as they "need to know" to accomplish their mission and no more. They must simply obey, whether they understand or not. Peter should have had this kind of attitude toward Jesus. But Peter did not. He said, "No, you shall never wash my feet" (8a). Peter flatly and unconditionally refused. Peter might have thought he was humble. But he was very proud. He thought his own idea was superior to Jesus' teaching. Hidden in each human being there is such a proud mind. It refuses to submit to Jesus' humble service and reacts with outrage when it is touched by Jesus. Although Jesus comes humbly as a servant, we must overcome our proud mind to accept him as he is.

Jesus helped Peter in this battle. In verse 8b, Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter was free to refuse Jesus' humble service. But it would be the end of their relationship. We cannot follow Jesus and our own idea at the same time. The only way to follow Jesus is to honor Jesus' word a little more than our own thoughts. Our minds must be captured by Jesus' word. When Peter realized he had to choose between Jesus' word and his own idea, he changed his

mind and said, “Then Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” In a way, he accepted Jesus’ word, but not really. Now he was adding to Jesus’ word with an extreme statement that went far beyond what Jesus required. Jesus had to correct him once again.

Look at verse 10. “Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.’” It was not necessary for Peter to wash his hands and head, that is, to take a bath. Jesus just wanted to wash Peter’s feet, no more and no less. To receive Jesus’ grace, we must simply accept what Jesus gives. We cannot add anything to it and we cannot omit anything from it. This is the right attitude toward Jesus as Lord. Jesus wanted Peter to simply accept his word without arguing or talking back or making extreme statements. In Matthew 5:37 Jesus said, “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” Because Peter was proud, the devil was toying with him also. We must take Jesus at his word.

Contained in verse 10 is the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ foot washing. Jesus compares taking a bath and having a clean body to receiving the word of God and having a clean mind and heart. In John 15:3 Jesus said to his disciples, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” When we accept one word of Jesus, it cleanses our minds and hearts from all our dirty sins. The word justifies us to be right with God and gives us eternal life. We have assurance that we belong to Jesus and no one can snatch us out of his hand. However we are still in the world. We see and hear things that contaminate our minds. For this, we need Jesus’ cleansing. So we need Jesus’ word every day, like our daily bread. Jesus taught us to pray for forgiveness daily.

Jesus washing our feet also symbolizes the work of sanctification. For example, Father Abraham had a habit of telling a white lie when his life was in danger. It was because of his fear. God bore with him more than 20 years. Finally, God exposed his problem in Gerar. Abraham might have felt shameful to have his inner fear exposed. But in this way, God healed him. God honored him as a spiritual leader before the king (Gen 20:17). His wife, Sarah, had a problem with hidden unbelief in her heart. When the Lord visited her and promised she would have a son, she laughed. God caught her in the laugh, then said, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen 18:14) God’s word touched her unbelief and she was healed. When the Lord wants to wash us, we must extend our dirty feet to him. Then he will cleanse and heal us.

However, there was one among the disciples who was not clean. He was Judas Iscariot. He was not clean because he had not accepted Jesus’ word. In spite of Judas’ devilish intention, Jesus never stopped loving him. Jesus knew his evil inner man fully, but Jesus still washed his feet. Jesus still offered to serve him and to cleanse him. Jesus’ love for Judas never failed. Jesus loved even Judas to the end.

Fourth, wash one another’s feet (12-17).

When Jesus finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. As he had promised Peter, he explained the meaning of his action so they could understand. Look at verses 14-15. “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” Jesus taught them that spiritual leadership is not like having worldly authority. Spiritual leaders must be

like Jesus. Spiritual leaders must be humble and they must serve. They must be willing to do the most menial and even dirty jobs to establish the bond of love with their coworkers. They must be willing to do the things that no one else wants to do without complaint. They must be willing to serve without receiving any kind of human honor or position. When spiritual leaders have this kind of attitude they can form a vessel of love that God can use for world mission.

Jesus would soon be taken from them. It would be up to the disciples to carry out the world mission purpose of Jesus. When they remembered Jesus' example and followed him they could overcome the schemes of the devil and obey God's will fruitfully. It was Jesus' deepest prayer that the disciples would be united in love and reveal him to the world by their love.

How can we follow Jesus' example? What does it mean to us to wash one another's feet? It means first of all that we have the attitude and take the position of a servant. There was an interesting picture of two shepherds. They were looking at one another. As they did so, their heads were at a 45 degree angle. Each one was trying to look down his nose at the other. Each one wanted to be considered better than the other and exalted above the other. This is the sinful tendency of all people. But when we remember how Jesus humbled himself to serve us, we can learn the attitude of a servant. Instead of trying to look down our noses at others we can take the position of a servant.

Soon, Dr. John Jun will come to Chicago. He is internationally renowned as a Christian leader. Still, Dr. Jun practices the humbleness of Jesus in serving others. Once a U.S. prayer journey team visited Korea for a World Mission Report. Shepherd Jim Rarick was on that team. He had injured his foot and it was



bandaged. Dr. John Jun visited him every day without fail, took off the old bandage, cleansed the wound, put on a clean bandage, and prayed for him. Shepherd Jim felt the love of Christ and the deep personal respect of a great servant of God. His faith was strengthened. It is not so difficult to point out others' weaknesses and faults, and then do nothing to help them. But it requires true humility, the attitude of Christ, to love others and serve them by washing their dirty feet. Yet, this is what our Lord Jesus did for each of us. And Jesus told us to follow his example.

In today's passage we learned that Jesus loves us. So he humbled himself to the lowest place to serve us. Ultimately, he bore our sins in his body on the cross. He wants us to love and serve others, following his example. May God help us to do so.