

In the Shadow of the Cross - Love Stooped to Serve

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus' action of washing his disciples' feet demonstrates his love, humility, and willingness to serve others, and is connected to his deity and his willingness to condescend to the lowest level.

Duration: 1:00:41

Scripture: Matthew 23:11, John 13:1-17

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage in John 13:2-8 where Jesus washes his disciples' feet. The preacher describes the physical actions of Jesus, emphasizing the humility and love displayed in this act. The sermon also highlights the awareness and consciousness of Jesus as he performs this task. The preacher introduces a series on John chapters 13 to 17, which took place less than 30 hours before Jesus' crucifixion, and emphasizes the significance of these teachings in the shadow of the cross.

Transcript

Well now, shall we turn prayerfully together tonight to John chapter 13, and to the passage that Mr. Lowe has already read for us. As was indicated this morning, we are beginning a short series that will, God willing, take us up to Easter time. We are taking it under the title, In the Shadow of the Cross.

Not that Jesus Christ is Lord, as you see in our calendar today. This is an indication that the line of communication has broken down somewhere. We are going to start another series a week on Sunday morning.

I'm going to start another series on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Mr. McLeod will have his own mini-series when he is preaching from time to time on the Sunday morning, and I will follow my own, taking a portrait, the portrait that we have in the New Testament of the total Lordship of Jesus Christ, and bringing it down, ultimately we trust, to the mundane details of everyday life, in order to see how he claims to be the absolute sovereign over his people. But that's by the way.

Tonight we are beginning this series on John chapters 13 to 17. It is not commonly appreciated by us, perhaps, that John 13 to 17 comprises precepts and prayer in John 17, all of which took place in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ less than 30 hours before his crucifixion. That is why we are giving this series the

title, In the Shadow of the Cross.

And I think it is necessary for us to remember that, that here, though our Lord appears to be leisurely, he is actually recognizing, as he tells us here and has already said in chapter 12, the hour, the one hour, upon which the destiny of the whole world rested or hung. That hour has now arrived, and he is moving forward towards it, and he is aware of all that. The time of his glorification upon the cross and beyond the crossing, going home to be the father, to be with the father, it has arrived.

The other thing that one needs to say by way of introduction is this. However you may choose to divide John's gospel, and there are various methods employed, some people see only two main divisions here, chapters 1 to 12 and 13 to the end. Others see as many as five, six, or even nine major divisions to the gospel of John.

But one thing is common to them all. Chapter 13 begins a new section. And it begins a new section, though I may be oversimplifying it in this way, but this is nonetheless true.

It begins a new section in this general sense. Up until now, our Lord has had a more universal sweep of ministry in mind. He has ministered to all kinds and conditions of people.

But at this point in time, he confines his ministry to his own, to the twelve. Now, if you and I can bear those two things in mind, we have a key, I think, or the keys to a better understanding of what we are going to encounter here. Our Lord is speaking very specifically to his own.

And therefore, I don't think one need apologize for quoting what someone has said, that here we are coming to what is probably the very holy of holiness. Holiness within holy writ itself. Now that brings us tonight then to our first study and meditation.

On John 13, 1 to 17, to which we have given the title, Love Stoops to Serve. I venture a threefold division that may help to focus our gaze upon the cardinal points in this passage. Taking the whole sweep of the passage, it'll be quite impossible to comment adequately upon any of the issues that arise here.

But I think it is best for us to have a bird's eye view of the whole, rather than to concentrate upon any one particular point. First of all, we see here the awareness that served as a back cloth to Jesus' action in washing the disciples' feet. Now that's what we have in verses 1 to 3. I hope you've got your New Testaments open before you.

I don't think I need now to read verses 1 to 3 again. But if you just glance over those three verses, you will see really what they're bringing before us is the consciousness of Jesus. What he was thinking about and how he was thinking and how he was feeling.

What's really going on in his mind and in his heart as he proceeds to take off his garments at last and to put on a towel and thus to wash the disciples' feet. Now the point that these verses seem to stress is this. That the action described later in verses 5 to 8 was not haphazardly performed, nor was it wrought by Jesus out of a sense of weakness, nor of failure, nor indeed of any disappointment.

Disappointed, though he could well be and well feel as far as at least two of his disciples are concerned, if not the total number. On the contrary, he acted as he did out of a conscious sense of the dignity of his person and of his destiny as one who is going to be with the Father and has already everything under his power and under his authority by the Father's sovereign provision. Two things then are in his

consciousness, knowledge and love.

Now let's look at these two. Jesus' consciousness relating to himself is here described by John in terms of certain things he knew and was conscious of them at the time. Look at the first verse.

I'm quoting from the NIV. Jesus knew that the time had come, that's one thing. The hour, literally, the hour for his messianic laying down of his life for the salvation of men.

Then go over to verse 3. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power. Now the underlying verb in both cases is a participle, *idos*, and it points to the underlying knowledge. Jesus did all these things knowing, not doubting, not being ignorant of what was going on, not out of disappointment with his disciples or for any other reason than this, knowing certain things about himself.

What did he know about himself? What did he know according to these three verses? Well, let's just focus attention on the two things to which we've already mentioned. Jesus acted in the awareness of the time in God's plan. It was just before the Passover feast.

Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father. Now the New International Version translates the underlying Greek word as the time had come. In your King James Version it refers to the hour, and that is literally what we have in the Greek.

The hour had come. Jesus knew that the hour had come. You read the Gospels, particularly the Gospel of John, you will find that up until this time or the time in chapter 12 when the Greeks came to visit him, there were many things that Jesus refused to do, and he gave us his reason, my hour is not yet come.

Starting off with a wedding in Cana in Galilee, certain things he was not eager to do. When his mother asked him to do something about the wine, my woman, he says, my hour is not yet come. He actually did do something there, but at first he was reticent because of that.

And in a number of other cases, my hour is not yet come. But in John chapter 12 he knew that the hour had arrived. And in verse 23 of chapter 12 he says this, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

It is very significant that knowing that the cross was before him, he also knew what was beyond the cross, namely resurrection and ascension, and his taking of his place as the high priest of his people at the Father's right hand. And all this seemed to him as his glorification, the hour of his glory had come. The Son of Man is to be glorified.

Now in our present text, Jesus describes that pending glorification in terms of his departure out of this world and his return to be with the Father. This was glory for him, going away from the world, going to be with the Father. Of course, we know full well that the Father was with him every moment of his sojourn on earth, but that was different.

His Father was with him. I am the Father, I am one, he says later on in John. Every word I speak, I speak as having received it from the Father.

And the works that I do, I do not of myself, but I do what the Father giveth me to do. My Father works hitherto and I'm working, we're working together, we're in this business together, if you'll pardon me for putting it like that. Jesus knew his Father's presence with him here upon earth in every scene.

But ah, this was different. Now he thought of himself as moving up to the very frontier that divided that place where his Father's throne was from the place where his Father's footstool was. Heaven is my throne, says God.

Earth is my footstool. And Jesus says, I'm about to cross the frontier. I'm going back to my Father, and that is glory.

Now that's the first element in his consciousness about himself. He's on his way to glory, and he knows it. The second is this.

He acted in the awareness of his authority as well as his destiny. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, literally into his hands. And that he had come from God and was returning to God.

Now when in a moment we shall come to see him taking off his garments and putting on a towel and washing his disciples' dirty feet, you and I need to bear these things in mind. Here is one who has the full awareness that the one pregnant hour upon which the destiny of the world rests has arrived, and he is involved in it, and he's going to overcome in it, and going to get to the glory of the Father through it. He has come from God, he's going to God, and everything has been delivered to him.

That's the consciousness. That's the awareness. That's how he thinks of himself.

Now, you will read here later on that Satan had already seduced Judas and prompted him to betray the Savior. But the real issue of Jesus' work was in no doubt whatsoever. This is important from the point of view of his own consciousness.

He knew that Judas had a part to play. He knew that the hour had come, and it was he who told Judas that the time had come for him to act and told him to do it quickly. But he did so, you see, as one who had everything in his hands, who could control the elements, who was sovereign over circumstances.

He did it not as one who was squeezed into a corner, but as the Lord of all beings, and of all being. Let's make such a world of it. Now, it was in the light of such knowledge that Jesus acted as he did.

The second element in Jesus' consciousness is that of his relationship, or concerning his relationship to his disciples. How did he think of them? What did he think of them? Look at that second part of the first verse. Having loved his own who were in the world, he showed them the full extent of his love.

That's the NIV. Or, he loved them to the very end, to the bitter end. In this very context, by means of his condescending to wash his disciples' feet, he does it, you see, out of sheer unadulterated love.

Unadulterated love for them. Now, that's the point. However you translate the idiomatic section here, whether he loved them to the end of time, or as far as love could go, or whether he was just showing them the extent of his love, however you translate it, it means this.

At that point in time, he did it out of love for them. So that the main element in his consciousness, as far as the disciples were concerned, was this. He did it out of love.

He loved them. Now, this is startling, really. Unless you have already come to an understanding of the person of Jesus and a recognition of his deity and of his infinite grace, how could you love those people? In the knowledge that each one of them, and Jesus did know, he tells them a little later on, in the knowledge that each one of them was going to run and leave him alone.

And particularly in the knowledge that Judas was going to betray him and Peter was going to deny him. But everything he does in this chapter, he does, as John puts it, he does it in order to show the real extent of his love for them. He showed them the full extent of his love.

He loved them unto the end. It was love that made him do it. Jesus proceeded then to engage in the act of washing his disciples' feet in the full knowledge of his own God-given authority and of his pending glory, as well as out of the consciousness of love for his own knowledge and love blend in his consciousness.

That's how he acted. Now, that brings us to the action performed by Jesus out of his conscious knowledge of his own authority and destiny and of his love for his own. Look at the picture that we have here, verse 2 and then from verse 4 to verse 8. This action would stand out as one of sheer love and unqualified humility in any set of circumstances, against any background.

But its unique nature comes to the fore in the light of our Lord's awareness of who he was and what his destiny was and that he was prepared to love and had genuine love for people like this. Now, look at what we have here. First of all, the time of the action, again, we need to notice because it is relevant to this.

The evening meal was being served and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray him. When did Jesus wash the disciples' feet? At Passover time. At Passover time, when the evening meal was already being served, says the NIV, and that is contrary to the King James Version, which says after the meal, when the meal was over.

Now, I think we must accept that the NIV is more accurate here. It has far better support in the ancient manuscripts for saying that, that Jesus actually did this during the meal, not after it. The meal was going on.

Jesus deemed his actions so very important. This is the point. So very important as to warrant the interruption of the meal.

They'd sat down, they'd got going, they'd started to eat, and then Jesus got up from the meal and later on, we realize, we are told that he went back and sat at the table again and they began to eat and later on, we're told that he passed the morsel to Judas. You see, they were still eating. He interrupted the meal.

He got up from the meal and then went back to it. Now, you may ask, if washing the disciples' feet was such an important thing, why didn't he do it at the beginning? You know, we're always like this. We're always asking questions, aren't we? If it was so important, sufficiently important to warrant our Lord getting up from the table and disturbing the meal, why didn't he do it first of all? Do you see this point to this? If you read Luke's gospel alongside of this, you will see that something had been going on again, something we've noticed before, and it's almost unbelievable.

On the very way from Bethany and out on the Mount of Olives where they'd been staying overnight, these disciples had been discussing again, what do you think? Well, yes, I'm sorry to say so. The question of who was the greatest among them. It's sad that it should be so, but the scriptures are so true and so accurate and so honest.

These disciples, believe it or not, have been discussing among themselves once again. They've been reprimanded for it before, but they're discussing again on the way to Jerusalem where Jesus was to lay down his life and where he told them he was going to lay down his life. They're discussing which of us is going to be the greatest.

And they were so preoccupied, you see, with the question of greatness and mastery and lordship one over another. Let me be boss. Let me have the first place.

Let me do this. Let me be that. I want this place.

I want that position. They were so preoccupied with that. Then they came to this room that was borrowed for the occasion of the feast.

It had been loaned them and so there was no one there, but they went to the room. There was some water there and there was evidently a towel there. Normally, had the room been occupied, had the owner of the room been there, somebody would have been provided to wash their feet, but there was no one there.

Well, now, of course, naturally, one of them should have done it. One of them should have been humble enough to say, well, all right, boys, I'll wash your feet. I'll do the menial task.

I'll do what is normally done on an occasion like this. But you see, they were not thinking of that. They were thinking, who's boss? Who's big? Who's master of the others? Who's supreme? And I want that first place.

And Jesus, you see, let them get seated at the supper and start the meal in order to let them see how far they were prepared to go without doing the kind of thing that was normally done, not simply for hygienic reasons, but for comfort. And when none of them was prepared to be the servant of the others, he said to himself, now it is my privilege to show them the way, the time of the action. He let them start the meal in order to indicate to them how preoccupation with self could lead them so far as to be right out of harmony and fellowship with the mind and purpose of God, the time of the action, the physical action itself.

Now, this is very familiar. Let me just read it and hardly make many comments here. 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. Six phases of the one action are expressed in those words. One, he got up from the table and away from the meal.

Two, he took off his outer garments. Three, he wrapped a towel around his waist. Four, he poured water into a dish.

Five, he began to wash the disciples' feet. Six, having washed their feet, he wiped them too. Now, there you have described one of the most menial tasks given either to a servant or a slave in any household.

Folk in the Palestine of Jesus' day generally wore sandals, sandals with no uppers to them, save the strap that held them onto the foot. And so, if it was summertime, your feet would be dusty. If it was wintertime, your feet would be very dirty.

And so, the feet needed washing when you came into the house for a meal. Comfort, as well as hygiene, were involved here. When none of the disciples volunteered to perform this menial task, as they entered the borrowed room where they were meeting, our Lord himself, notice, our Lord himself, now, notice this.

Let me repeat it. In the full awareness of his dignity, knowing whence he'd come and where he was going, knowing that the Father had put everything under his authority as the Lord of destiny, in whose hand the whole universe rested at that moment, knowing all that, he took off his robe, he took the towel, he got the

water, he knelt down, he went for the disciples' feet and washed them. Now, I can only ask you to do this.

I can't pursue it. Many commentators, ancient and modern, relate this event to the doctrinal statement concerning our Lord's incarnation and his self-humbling that we have in Philippians 2. You remember that passage? Who, being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing. That's the NIV.

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, became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Where in the upper room Jesus dramatized the truth affirmed by Paul, there in the upper room, I should say, Jesus dramatized the truth, the doctrine declared by Paul, and it is evident that both the doctrinal statement and the dramatized version portray the same amazing phenomenon of our Lord's infinite condescension.

The physical action. Now, the confrontation that temporarily interrupted that action, verses 6 to 9. First, you have Peter's initial hesitation. Look at verse 6. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Peter instinctively recognized the sheer incongruity of the one whom he had earlier confessed as Messiah, Son of the living God, coming to wash his feet.

Now, bless him. Peter had enough spirituality. Peter had grown in grace sufficiently to recognize that there was something totally incongruous about this.

Of course, perhaps his conscience pricked him too, that he, along with the others, should have been talking on the way as to which of them should be the greatest. At any rate, putting everything together, Peter objected. He says, Master, Master, there's something radically wrong about this.

Are you going to wash my feet? You, this is the Greek, you, my feet washing? And the contrast is between you, my feet? No, no, never, says Peter. This is all incongruous. Then hesitation hardened into a blunt rejection.

Even when Jesus promised him a future explanation. Jesus replied, Peter, you do not realize now what I'm doing. But later on, you will understand.

No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. You got the point? Of course, we can all understand Peter's initial hesitation. As he sensed the awful incongruity and apparent irrationality of Messiah, son of the living God, condescending to wash his feet, to do the most menial act a slave was asked to do.

And Peter reacted, saying, what, you, what, you, what, you, my feet washing? But that hesitation was understandable. But now, humbled by the thought of his Lord proceeding to do what he, Peter, and the others had deigned to be beneath their dignity, Peter was still proud enough and arrogant enough to reject any thought that there could be a future explanation that was adequate for him to submit his feet to the Savior. In other words, in other words, though he confessed Jesus to be Messiah, son of the living God, and much else over the period of time that he'd been with him, he still believed that he was making a terrible blunder now.

There can be no explanation of this kind of thing to warrant Simon, Peter, or any of the others letting Jesus wash their feet. At that point, Jesus' action was temporarily interrupted. But now notice the affirmation that ended Peter's resistance.

It came to an end very suddenly. We read in verses 8 and 9, the second part of verse 8, Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then Lord Simon, Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.

He's catapulted all right. He's capitulated all right. We shall not now comment on those words other than to point out that whatever else those words imply, they do imply this.

They do show us that Peter was so tremendously attached to his Lord, and he would rather follow his Lord and do what his Lord commanded him without knowing the reason why, if needs be, rather than hear the Lord say, you've got no part with me. With all his faults, with all his follies, with all his sins, Peter had come to the point where to live in sin was Christ and nothing else. Better live with Jesus and do what you don't understand.

He's asking you to do it and do it only because he's asking you to do it, not because you understand. Do it in ignorance, if need be, rather than face the prospect of being separated from him. And so he goes to the other extreme and he says, Lord, it says, all right then, not only my hand, not only my feet, but my hands and my head, and I'll take my whole body and give me a bath.

That's what he said. Now that brings us to the third main section here, the application of the truths taught by our Lord's action, verses 8 to 17. Now there is more to this episode than the mere physical act of a supreme being washing the feet of unworthy sinners. The superficial reader might simply conclude that all we have here is Jesus showing a little bit of humility, washing the feet of his disciples.

Well, now there is much, much more than that in this passage. It was actually suggested in verse 7. Now I ask you to look carefully if you want to see the point. Jesus there said to Peter, you do not realize now what I'm doing, but later you will understand.

You don't know now what I'm doing, but later you will understand. But now hang on a moment. What was he doing? Washing Peter's feet.

Surely that's not difficult to understand. He knew what was going on. Of course he did.

He knew the physical act. He knew exactly the implications of it. His own feet had been washed many times as he'd gone into a house like this.

So there's nothing extraordinary about the physical act in and of itself per se. Do you see what Jesus said? No, no, Peter, you don't understand what I'm doing now. I'm doing something more than is obvious.

And you don't understand now. You're quite right. You were asking questions.

Well, all right. I understand your questions. You don't understand now.

But you shall later on. What is Jesus saying? What he's saying is this. There's more to this than meets the eye.

Verse 8 makes the point still clearer. Jesus there added that unless he washed Peter's feet, Peter would have no part with him. Except I wash thee, thou hast no part with me, says the King James.

Now, what do you think of that? Is Jesus really saying what he appears to be saying? That if he doesn't wash a person's feet, he can't be a disciple? Certainly not. Jesus never said to anybody in his three and a

half years public ministry, look here, if you want to be a disciple of mine, I've got to wash your feet. He never said that.

That's not a prerequisite of discipleship. But he seems, he appears superficially to be saying to Peter, Peter, unless I wash your feet, you can't have anything to do with me. Evidently then, there is more to this feet washing than meets the eye.

And Jesus is saying so. I've got to do this for you, not because of the washing of the feet per se, but because it is indicative. Because it is symbolic.

Because it stands for something that is bigger than itself. Now, I cannot pursue this, but I can throw it out to you. If you're very familiar with John's gospel, then you will know that this is nothing strange to Jesus' teaching method, as John represents it.

Jesus often did this in principle. He would take something quite simple like, he would refer to birth as he does in John chapter three. And after speaking about birth, he would speak about a second birth of being born again.

Well, he would take, he would refer to water and he would speak of it as the water of life. He would take bread and he would speak of it as the bread that brings eternal life. And he would take some of the most simple things, and there would be two meanings to what he was saying or to the actions he was doing.

Not one, but two and maybe even more. And that's exactly what we have here. Granted, however, that we have here a typical illustration of one of Jesus' methods of teaching.

What truth or truths are symbolically or parabolically enunciated by his act of washing his disciples' feet? What is there more than meets the eye in this act of feet washing? I want to mention three things. Will you forgive me? I have to sip some water tonight. I'm nearly losing the water.

I'll tell you a little secret. I swallowed a chicken bone earlier on today and it's stuck in my throat here somewhere. I'm afraid.

Or it's left some mark behind it. So don't get excited. All is well.

The Lord will look after us. But I have to keep something moving. Now, having had the explanation, you can pray for me.

There are three things here. First of all, the action dramatized our Lord's saving work. Now, let me say that again.

This act whereby our Lord washed the disciples' feet, dramatized, was an enactment of the work that he had come to do as Savior. What is that? The work of spiritual cleansing. When our Lord told Peter, unless I wash you, you have no part with me, he was unquestionably thinking of the physical act as a parabolic representation of the spiritual cleansing which he had come to make possible for mankind, rendered unclean by sin.

Five times between verses 5 and 10, we note the Greek word *niphto*, which means to wash, to wash a part of the body. Five times between verses 5 and 10. One Greek word meaning to wash.

Once we encounter another Greek verb, luo, meaning to bath or to bathe. And then we have another word, it's an adjective, katharos, meaning clean. Three different words about cleansing or making clean or purging.

You see, the whole passage actually hinges on the concept of cleansing. The notion of salvation as cleansing was not unfamiliar to the people of the New Testament. If you read your Old Testament, you will find that over and over again, salvation was described under this metaphor, under this image or motif.

Let me just give you one illustration and refer to others. Let me just quote this one reference to the Messiah in Zechariah 13.1. On that day, said Zechariah, looking ahead, on that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from their sin and impurity. Oh, there's a glorious day coming, says the prophet, and it's a day when a fountain will be opened that will do something that no other fountain can do.

It will be a fountain opened and those that move into this fountain or are baptized by its waters, they will know something of the purifying work of God. Now you have the same notion of cleansing in Psalm 51, in Jeremiah 33, in Ezekiel 36, and in many other places. Salvation is described basically as a cleansing of the soul, a purging of the inner man, and if it is not that, then it is not salvation.

When you come over to the pages of the New Testament, you find that the writers of the New Testament have exactly the same thought in mind in many places. Let me read you perhaps just two quotes now. The familiar word from Ephesians chapter 5, verses 25 to 27.

Husbands, says Paul, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, now cleansing her. By the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain, or wrinkle, or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Cleansed.

The church of Jesus Christ is cleansed. The basic impurity has been taken out. Jesus has washed us.

Now it may sound terribly old-fashioned, but I'm going to dare to ask you tonight, have you been to Jesus for the cleansing blood? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? Are your garments spotless? Are they white as snow? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? For that same word comes up in the book of the Revelation and says that all the redeemed of the Lord were washed in his blood. Whatever your theological professor tells you, the Bible says, that a man is purged from his sin because of the merits of the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus, and he's cleansed in the inner being. The word of the gospel performs that when it is received by faith.

I'll take this other great word of St. Paul's in Titus 3. When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things that we had done, but why then? But because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Ghost. The washing of the rebirth.

You and I never know what's going on all together when God is at work in our souls. We concentrate on the fact that at the rebirth we are made new creatures, rightly so, but a new person who is clean. Hallelujah.

Who is purged. New and clean. Now the same concepts emerge in the epistle to the Hebrews in 1 John and again as I've indicated in the book of Revelation.

Salvation is a cathartic process. God purges us. If you don't know anything about this tonight, my dear friend, you need it.

Don't leave this service without it, but come to the throne of grace and plead with God for it. Salvation involves a cleansing of the soul from moral and spiritual defilement. You see, the most damaging dirt is not that which clings to our hands, our feet, our face, but that which clings to our hearts, to our spirits, to our souls and gets into the crevices of our imaginations and lingers there and putrefies the inner man.

And Jesus is the exclusive purifier of the innermost soul of a sinner. Salvation involves the purging of a person in the innermost depths. That's one thing then.

Here we see symbolized or enacted or dramatized, however you'll have it, the saving work of Jesus. He comes to wash the disciples' feet. Yeah, but behind that it indicates his ministry of coming and stooping, coming down from his throne, coming down to his cross, being made nothing.

What for? To wash our sins away. Secondly, Jesus' acts dramatized his sovereign demands upon his followers. When Peter heard that submission to Jesus' action was essential to sharing life and destiny with him, he not only yielded his feet as we have seen, but he offered his whole body for Jesus to have, to bathe him.

In response, Jesus made a very important distinction. Now listen to this, 10 and 11. Jesus answered, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet.

His whole body is then clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him.

And that was why he said, not every one of you is clean. Now you'll notice that Jesus distinguished there between having a complete bath, that's the picture, lure, and washing one's feet or hands, nip and toe. And he told Peter, Peter, he says, uh, you've had a bath and the only thing you need now is to wash the soiled part of you, which is your feet.

Probably, you see, he was thinking of Peter having joined in with the twelve and talking about themselves and who is going to be the greatest. Peter has been forgiven his sins and he's had the cleansing. But oh, how the inner heart, some, whether it's imagination or mind, I'm not sure, but he's become begrimed.

He's become, he's become soiled again and he needs to bring that soiled part to Jesus to be cleansed. But he doesn't need to be, as it were, completely forgiven again, as he was the first time he brought the whole of his past sins to Jesus for forgiveness and for cleansing. He needs the soiled part cleansed and that only.

Now, behind that language lay a very common experience on the natural plane, which Jesus was evidently using in order to portray spiritual truth. It was almost the invariable habit. When you went out for a meal, orientals of our Lord's day, they would first have a bath.

Before they went to anybody's house, they had a bath. But invariably, when they arrived at the house where they were going for a meal, they would be there at the door, some water and somebody with a towel who would do the menial task and wash your feet. Because in winter you'd get them dirty, in summer you'd get them dusty.

So for your comfort, as well as for hygienic reasons, as we've mentioned, somebody was there to wash the feet. A person had got his feet dusty on the way to the party, on the way to the meal, but he was bathed, he was quite clean. Now Jesus is using this, you see, and he's telling Peter that's exactly how it is spiritually.

When you receive the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ, or alternately, when you're regenerated by the work of God's Spirit upon you, you emerge as a man or a woman cleansed in the depths. Then you begin to walk in this soiling world, and your mind gets dirty. You need to cleanse, take it to Jesus, yield it to him.

He expects you to. It's part of his lordship over you. He tells you, bring the soiled feet, or the soiled hands, or the soiled emotions, or the soiled mind, or the soiled conscience, or the soiled will.

Bring your soiled self to me, and let me wash you. Let me cleanse you. The local defilement needs to be purged.

That's what John has in mind when he says, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now my friends, Jesus comes to you like that tonight. Have you had the full cleansing? Have you brought yourself, your soul, with all its accumulated filth of the past for Jesus to bathe you? If you've not done that before, bring it tonight, and he'll wash you cleaner than the snow, whiter than the drill snow.

But that's not all. Then you'll start walking as a Christian, and you'll start mingling with people who are not Christian, and you'll find that your mind is getting a little bit dirty. Take it to Jesus.

Let him cleanse it again. This is part of the sovereignty he expects over you as the physician that has taken you unto his care to make you whole. And he tells you, I expect this of you.

Hand me your feet, Peter, he says. Don't be stubborn, man. You're under my care, and I must have your feet to wash them.

Unless I wash you, you have no part with me, no fellowship with me. When you hold on to the soiling of your conscience, or the soiling of your mind, rather than let Jesus cleanse you, you are choosing darkness rather than light, and you are choosing a path that holds no promise of fellowship with him. Lastly, Jesus' action dramatized his saving work, his sovereign demands, and then the servant role he requires us, his followers, to assume, verses 12 to 17.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I've done for you, he asked them? You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Now this section also portrays Jesus' sovereign demands over us, of course. Of course it does, but the emphasis is on the other side of the coin, the corresponding submission he requires of us. He expects us to act as his servants in serving one another.

If he has cleansed us of our sins, he has released us to be humble. If he has cleansed us of our sins and he keeps on purging us from the parts that are tainted from time to time, then he has provided for us the spirit in which we may do this and ought to love to do it. Having washed the feet of all those present, Jesus resumed his place at the table and he asked the group if they really understood.

Now here it is, he says, you call me master and teacher. Now that's quite right, you're quite right. Your view of me corresponds my view of myself.

These two words correspond to Jesus' consciousness as revealed in the first three verses of the chapter, and correspond to the truth of what is revealed about Jesus. He was rabbi and he was curious, Lord. And thus finally says, you call me that.

Now he says, all right, if you call me that, then do what I bid you do, and do as I have done. Don't be obsessed with thoughts of personal superiority, clinging to your supposed prerogatives, wanting to hold on to a place of honor. Very good, and agree to do the menial thing just because I've set an example for you, and I've cleansed you from your sin, and I've freed you for the Spirit's inspiration and enabling to do what is right.

And so our Lord proceeds to underscore the point by drawing the attention of his disciples to the implication of his own example. He says, you see, in my own consciousness I'm greater than you are, and according to your own confession, you call me master and Lord, or rabbi and Lord. It's quite right, he says.

You acknowledge me to be greater than you are. We are not equals, you and I. I am of a different kind to you. I am the Lord from heaven, and I'm going to be in the glory of my Father, and my Father has put everything in my hands.

That's who I am. But now, he says, I did this. Now he says, the servant is not greater than his master, and you call me master? You shouldn't find it more difficult than I found it.

And the messenger is not more important than the one who sent the messenger, who commissioned him? You are the messenger, I'm the commissioner. If I then, in the awareness of my dignity, and my glory, and my deity, and my sovereignty, and my destiny, if I have done this and done it out of sheer love, and you are mine, and I've washed your sins away, and I've given you my Holy Spirit, and I promise to be with you to the end, even though I'm going to leave you physically, if I am your master and your Lord, and you acknowledge me as such, this is the way for you, this last one. I think it's a very crucial one.

Can we speak of it as a parting shot? It's a very precious parting shot. You notice how this passage ended? Jesus said, now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you what? Talk about them? Well, there'd be no harm in talking about them, pass them on, tell others about them, that's not what he said. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you, if you sing about them? He didn't say that either.

Much easier to sing and talk about them and preach about them than it is to do what Jesus said, but you know what he said? Of course you do. What is the way to blessedness? What is the way to glory? What is the way to blessedness? That leads to glory and ends in glory. What is the way of blessedness? Well, you know what to do and by the grace of God and the enabling of the Savior.

Does that mean that I go around the people in Knox tonight and ask them to take their shoes off for me to wash their feet? Well, now that's neither here nor there. If they've got sore feet, it may be a good thing to

offer that to somebody who needs it, physically, literally. But what our Lord means is this, be humble enough to serve one another.

Put yourself at the disposal of your brothers and your sisters and don't be afraid of getting your hands dirty, if needs be, in order to express the purity of your soul in love. Oh, my dear brothers and sisters, we need to grow in this, don't we? I know I do. May the Spirit of God draw near to us at the end of another Lord's day and just drive this home to our hearts.

He's put you and he's put me in places where he wants us to do what he would do if he were there. What would he do towards his own, even a Judas, even a difficult Peter? Boy, Peter was difficult at times. What would he do? He was aware of his deity and his destiny and his glory and his authority.

What would he do? Well, he would do whatever he did out of love, even for the most imperfect saint. Now, he says, you know what I want of you.

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