

Washing Feet - John 13:1-17

by Jon Courson

The key to loving others is to know that your past is forgiven and forgotten through your salvation in Jesus Christ, and to be willing to serve and humble yourself in love.

Scripture: Matthew 11:30, John 13:35, John 14:1, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 8:12, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Christian Love", "Humility Service"

Description

Jon Courson preaches on the importance of love as the key component of Christianity, emphasizing Jesus' commandment to love one another in John 13:35. He highlights the freedom to love that comes from knowing our past sins are forgiven and our future is secure in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:12, Romans 5, John 14:1). Courson discusses the cost of love, involving interruptions and personal involvement, using Jesus washing the disciples' feet as a model for humble service and love. He addresses the difficulties with love, including dealing with people who reject help or become overly dependent, and emphasizes the need to say no when necessary, guided by the Lord's leading (Matthew 11:30). Courson concludes by discussing practical ways to show love in everyday life and the theological and mystical aspects of confession and spiritual cleansing (1 John 1:9, 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Transcript

'What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It's the only thing that there's just too little of.' Written by Burt Bacharach almost twenty years ago, the song became one of the top-selling songs of the decade because it struck a chord in our generation. 'All you need is love,' sang the Beatles. And we answered, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.'

Not only our generation -- but in every generation there is a craving for the reality of love. Jesus Christ addressed this issue radically. In John 13-16, He reaffirms to His disciples that the key commodity, the key component of Christianity is love. As He calls His boys together only hours away from the Cross, the commandment He gives them is not a commandment to be more zealous, more dedicated, or more committed. The commandment He stresses so emphatically is that they love each other, for by this, He would say, all men would truly know they were His disciples (John 13:35).

Before He gives this teaching to them, however, Jesus sets the stage by being an example for them as He washes their feet. And in the example He sets for His disciples, I see four key factors which, I believe, will help you and me to carry out the commandment to love one another.

The Freedom to Love

Even as they're arguing, even as Judas is preparing to betray Him, even as the hour is heavy, Jesus has perfect liberty to love. Why? Because He knew He came from God.

If you are still struggling with mistakes you made last week or last month or last year, you will not be free to love. If you are still working through your past, living in your past, haunted by your past, you will not be able to love in the present because the more you try to love someone, the more Satan will whisper in your ear, 'You're a hypocrite.' We are told in Revelation 12 that Satan is the accuser of the brethren. How does he accuse us? By constantly replaying our past failures and inconsistencies to the point where we feel unqualified to do anything but wallow in defeat.

But this is the good news: If you're a believer, all of your failures and sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. Every sin you've ever committed is not only forgiven, but forgotten (Hebrews 8:12). I am absolutely at peace with my past not because of my perfection -- not by a long shot -- but because of my salvation in Jesus Christ and in what He did for me at Calvary (Romans 5).

Not only did Jesus know He came from God, but He also knew He was going to God. If you're always concerned about how the stock market's going, or if the relationship will survive -- if you're living in the future, you'll miss the opportunity to love in the present. 'Let not your heart be troubled,' Jesus said, (John 14:1).

Who cares about the stock market? Who cares about whether that little thing works out or not. It's irrelevant. We know we're going to heaven. We really are. If I believe that, I can truly say, 'By faith in Jesus Christ my past is taken care of by the blood of Calvary; my future, my hope is in heaven; and I am free to love in the present.'

That's why Paul said there are three great virtues: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest is love. Why? Because it takes faith for the past and hope for the future to allow men to love in the present. Faith makes all things possible. Hope makes all things inevitable. But love makes all things enjoyable. Knowing from whence He came, knowing where He was going, Jesus was free to love.

The Cost of Love

Sitting at dinner, Jesus was suddenly aware that His disciples needed their feet washed -- and in so doing, His meal was interrupted. So too, if you are going to be one who loves people, count on interruptions. There you'll be with a bag of popcorn in your hand and the 49ers on TV, when suddenly, there will be a knock on your door or a ring of your phone. If you're going to be one who loves, it means you'll have to be willing to be interrupted.

Notice not only interruptions, but also involvement. The cost of love? Interruptions in your agenda, and involvement with people. Jesus didn't stand up and say, 'There's a strange odor in here. I now want to tell you guys why you should wash your feet before you eat. Peter, you big heel, don't you see your foot is cruddy? James, your sole is dirty.' No, Jesus didn't give a lecture on feet or on the dirt thereon. Rather, He got down on His hands and knees and washed them.

Listen carefully. If you are not willing to wash feet, then keep your mouth closed when you see dirt. When I see dirt, I can either talk about the dirt, which then is called judging -- or I can involve myself in that person's life by tending the situation on my knees in humility through intercession. Jesus chose the latter.

He didn't simply point out the dirt on the feet of His disciples. He did something about it.

A Model for Love

Jesus' act was unannounced. He didn't stand up and say, 'Disciples, you will now see love in action. Watch Me. Take notes. A few photos will be allowed.' No, He just quietly got up and washed feet. It was not something which He announced; it was not something all of Jerusalem could see. He just quietly took care of the situation.

'Well, that would be easy,' you say, 'if I had opportunity to minister to guys like the disciples.' Really? Ever been around a political rabble-rouser? That was Simon the Zealot. How about someone so shy that not a single word of his is ever recorded? That was James the Less. How about one who was skeptical of you? That was Nathanael. One who would deny you? That was Peter. How about one who would stab you in the back like Judas?

Go from man to man in the group and you'll see they're people just like the folks around you every single day. Yet Jesus, in a beautiful humble way loves these guys who are not very lovable. This gives me great hope because I'm not very lovable either. And it gives me great comfort to realize that the Lord loves us not because we are lovable, but because He is Love.

The Difficulties with Love

Jesus wants to wash Peter's feet, but what happens? Peter protests. So too, some people you want to help and love just won't let you. I recently went to see a man dying of a heart disease in the Hospital. As I entered his room, where he was hooked up to tubes and wires, he said, 'I know who you are. You're the preacher at Applegate. I don't want to hear one word you have to say. Get out of my room. Leave me alone. Let me die and go to wherever.' He died a few hours later.

Not only do some people, in a show of independence, say, 'You're not going to wash any part of me,' but, like Peter, some say, 'Wash all of me.' No, Peter, that's not it either. You see, there's a second problem: overdependence. Some will say, 'You better keep helping me every day in every way, or you're not a good Christian.' They'll expect much from you and lay demands on you; they'll seek to exploit and manipulate you to get more than what they need.

Therefore, sometimes it's the loving thing to do to say No to someone; to say, 'I'm not the Lord in your life; I can't be the solution to your problem. I can help you; I can wash your feet. But you don't need a bath.' What's the solution? Simply to say to people, 'I'll go with what I believe the Lord is showing me in my heart. I'll respond according to His leading, but not according to your demanding.' Gang, the Lord's burden is easy, and His load light (Matthew 11:30). Sometimes you gotta learn to say no.

Practically

In our culture, not everyone wears sandals or goes barefoot. And even if they did, the roads aren't dusty or muddy -- so this passage might not mean washing feet. It might mean washing cars . . . You're washing your car in the front yard. Maybe it's old and cruddy and doesn't run very well. Instead of complaining about it -- why not extend your hose a bit and wash your neighbor's car?

Or maybe it means washing your neighbor's windows while he's on vacation. It might mean washing diapers in the nursery -- or washing the dishes without being asked. 'That sounds good,' you say, 'but I'm

going through such hard times right now that I'm not in a position to wash anything.'

Really? At any given point, at every single point in our lives, we live by basin theology. That is, we either call for the basin, like Pontius Pilate did (Matthew 27:24), and wash our hands of everything we know to be true of ministry and service -- or we take up the basin and wash someone's feet in humility and love.

At the very time Jesus was going through a time of intensity we will never understand this side of eternity, He didn't wash His hands of those who would deny and betray Him. He washed their feet.

Theologically

Positionally, we are the very righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:21). But as we walk through the world, there is a need for the cleansing of fellowship which takes place in the confession of sin. We're born again. We're believers. We're going to heaven -- but we still have failings. We still have shortcomings. And we need to be washed continually. How?

1 John 1:9 says if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We need to live in the place of continual confession in order to appropriate the finished work of Calvary and to eliminate Satan's toehold in our lives. Saint, you don't need to be re-baptized or re-saved. You just need to make confession -- and He'll wash your feet at the point you do.

Mystically

So often, people come to me, saying, 'I was baptized six years ago, but since then, I've gone through a period of backsliding. Should I be baptized again?' 'No,' I say. 'But there is something else available to you . . .' You see, in my understanding the washing of feet is a mini-baptism for those who say, 'I know I didn't lose my salvation, but I've been walking in pollution and defilement. I just want to do something tangibly and outwardly to express what I'm feeling inwardly -- that I'm back with the Lord.'

And as others humble themselves to wash their feet and pray for them, to give a word of prophecy or encouragement to them, there's a unique, undeniable dynamic which takes place. It's not enough just to hear a Bible study and agree with it intellectually. We must not simply be a community where we affirm our beliefs. We must be a place where we encounter God. How? By drinking of the blood of Jesus Christ and eating His body; by making confession in humility; by baptism; by washing feet.

We must not be a church where we merely affirm our beliefs. We must be more than that. We must be a people who truly encounter the Lord. In Jesus' Name.

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