

The High Priest of the Israel of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Lord Jesus, as the High Priest, teaches us the importance of spiritual cleansing and separation from the world, and the necessity of washing one another's feet as a symbol of restoration and meekness.

Scripture: John 13:8-17, Galatians 6:1, Hebrews 3:1

Topics: "Jesus As Priest", "Spiritual Cleansing"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the significance of Jesus washing His disciples' feet in John 13, drawing parallels to the Old Testament laver used by priests for cleansing. He emphasizes that Jesus, as the High Priest, sets an example of humility and service for His followers, symbolizing the need for separation from the defilement of the world. The act of foot-washing represents spiritual cleansing and the ministry of helping one another stay clear of worldly influences, reflecting Jesus' love and humility towards His disciples despite their faults.

Transcript

Reading: John 13:1-16

If there were space I would turn you to the Old Testament and we would read together four passages which relate to the making and setting up of the laver in the court of the tabernacle. You will remember that the Lord commanded Moses to make a laver of brass and it was to be placed right at the center of the outer court. It was to be filled with water and there the priests were to wash their hands and their feet before they entered into the holy place. Although it does not say so, it is very probable that they washed one another's feet. Whether that was true or not - and I think it was - this laver was for such washing in relation to the sacrifice.

Here in the thirteenth chapter of John the Lord Jesus is acting in the capacity of the priest; in the seventeenth chapter is what is universally called the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus. There is so much in that prayer which is taken up from the thirteenth chapter - "Sanctify them in the truth... for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."

So in chapter thirteen we have the Priest taking the water and washing the feet of His brothers - His brother priests. He is doing it in the light of a coming day. He said: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter", and afterward it became quite clear that all the Lord's people are priests. All are called into the sacred ministry of priesthood.

That is a very large subject, and I can do no more than just state the truth and leave it there for the time being.

What is the very heart of this chapter? It is in verse eight: "Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Now we are back with our word in the Letter to the Hebrews which is rightly translated 'Companions': "We are become COMPANIONS of Christ". These words "part with me" are from the same root as that word "companions". Jesus is saying here: 'Unless I wash you, you can never become My companions. It is those whose feet I have washed who are My companions of the heavenly way.'

The companions of Jesus must have clean feet. In His prayer He made it perfectly clear what that means: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16) ... "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). The companions of Jesus are those whose feet symbolically are separated and cleansed from the world.

This world lies under a curse, under the judgment of God. It is an evil world and the Lord does not want His companions to be entangled in it, so His work for us is to separate us from it. Feet mean contact with the earth, and the Lord Jesus would break that contact where His own companions are concerned. If we want to be companions of Christ, we must be delivered from this present evil world. Contact with it means death, defilement. It is a world that is against the Lord Jesus. The Lord is saying here in this symbolic act: 'My companions are not of this world.' He has done it in Himself once for all.

Of course, there is far more in this than I am able to say at present, but we all know how true this is. Jesus has not taken us out of the world. We are here and surrounded by defilement. It is indeed a sinful world! The Lord Jesus would have us delivered from it, and He has done the work by which we can be separated from its evil.

That opens up the whole subject of sanctification, but for our purpose it just explains that word in Hebrews 3:1: "Wherefore, HOLY brethren" ... 'Brethren who are sanctified', which means separated, 'unto God'. Such are the companions of Christ and of the heavenly calling.

But the Lord Jesus also instituted a ministry for His companions. He said: "I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." He was saying, in other words: 'You must help one another to keep clear of the spirit of this world.' The word which explains that is: "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1). The meekness of Jesus in this act offended Peter: 'You, Lord and Master, getting down on your knees and washing my feet! I could not think of it - I could not allow it. I cannot let you humiliate yourself like that!' ... "Ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of meekness."

You and I have to learn more about this. It is a spiritual ministry that is very much needed. There are bodies of Christians in this world who practise this literally and have it as part of their service to wash one another's feet. Well, we will not discuss whether they are right or wrong. I think, though, that you might wash someone's feet literally and not do it spiritually. You might wash someone's feet literally and then go away and talk about their faults and their weaknesses to someone else. I think we are too much accustomed to pointing out the dirt that is on people's feet rather than removing it. Our criticisms and our condemnations of one another! It does not need an expert to see the spiritual uncleanness of people and the touch of this world upon them. Anyone can see their faults.

What are we going to do? Talk about them? Point them out to other people? Keep them always in view? Allow our attitudes toward them to be influenced by these faults?

If you read through these Gospels you will see that the disciples had plenty of uncleanness on their feet. They quarrelled as to who should be greater in the Kingdom of Heaven and strove together to have the first place. It is all an unpleasant story! They had plenty of faults and failings. Their feet were indeed tainted by this world, but what does it say here about the attitude of Jesus? Such men as they were, yet... "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end", and to show His love He humbled Himself. He laid aside the garment of His own glory and took the form of a bondservant. He girded Himself with a towel - the symbol of humble service. He did not say: 'Oh, what a lot of dirt you have on your feet!' - He washed it away.

Then He said: "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" - 'You are priests unto God. Take the water of the laver and wash one another's feet. Only thus can you be companions of the holy place, of the heavenly calling.'

Do you notice that there is a blessing attached to this? It is in verse seventeen: "If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." So there is a blessing attached to washing one another's feet!

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