

Jesus Washes His Disciples Feet

by William MacDonald

Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet teaches us the importance of humility, receiving graciously, and being open to kindness and service from others.

Scripture: Matthew 20:28, Luke 6:38, John 13:8, Romans 12:10, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Galatians 6:2, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 4:17, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Humility", "Service"

Description

William MacDonald explores the profound lesson of humility and service in the act of Jesus washing His disciples' feet, particularly focusing on Peter's initial refusal. Peter's reaction stems from a mix of unworthiness and pride, reflecting a common struggle where individuals resist accepting grace and help from others. MacDonald emphasizes that many Christians, while eager to give, often struggle to receive, missing out on the blessings of mutual support and community. He illustrates this with examples from Paul and Bishop Westcott, highlighting the importance of allowing others to serve us as a form of grace. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a balance between giving and receiving in our relationships with God and each other.

Transcript

“Thou shalt never wash my feet.” (John 13:8)

The Lord Jesus had just girded Himself with a towel and filled a basin with water, preparatory to washing the disciples' feet. When He came to Peter, He met this emphatic refusal, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

Why? Why didn't Peter want to submit to this gracious ministry from the Lord? On the one hand, there may have been a sense of unworthiness; he did not consider himself worthy to be served by the Lord. But there is also the real possibility that Peter's attitude was one of pride and independence. He did not want to be on the receiving end. He did not want to be dependent on others for help.

This same attitude keeps many people from being saved. They want to earn salvation or deserve it, but to receive it as a free gift of grace is beneath their dignity. They don't want to feel indebted to God. But “no one who is too proud to be infinitely in debt will ever be a Christian” (James S. Stewart).

There is also a lesson here for those who are already Christians. We have all met believers who are compulsive givers. They are always doing for others. Their lives are poured out in service for their relatives and neighbors. Their generosity deserves high praise. But there is a fly in the ointment! They never want to be on the receiving end. They never want anyone to do anything for them. They have learned how to give generously but they have never learned how to receive graciously. They enjoy the blessing of ministering to others, but they deny to others that same blessing.

Paul proved himself to be a gracious recipient of gifts from the Philippians. In thanking them, he said, "Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account" (Phil. 4:17). He thought of their reward more than of his own need.

"It is told of Bishop Westcott that at the end of his life he said he had made one great mistake, for, while he had always been willing to do for others to the limit of his ability, he had never been willing to let others do for him, and as a result some element of sweetness and completeness was missing. He had not allowed himself the discipline of receiving many kindnesses which could not be repaid" (J. O. Sanders).

An unknown poet summed it up well when he wrote:

I hold him great, who, for love's sake,
Can give with generous, earnest will;
But he who takes for love's sweet sake,
I think I hold more generous still.

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