

50. Humility personified

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There are 89 chapters in all four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. 85 of 89 chapters focus on the last three and a half years of Jesus’ life on earth. Then, 29 out of those 85 chapters focus on the final week of Jesus on earth. Finally, 13 out of 29 deal with the last 24 hours of His life.

From chapter 13 to 17 in the Book of John, apostle John covers the Last Supper, a.k.a., the “Upper Room Discourse.” At this point, Jesus had less than 18 hours before His crucifixion.

This is a very, very private setting, no public was allowed. Jesus chose this place for this moment so that He could instruct and prepare His disciples for the upcoming traumatic situation – His own crucifixion and burial.

Though Jesus was sitting at the head of the table which was the place of honor, but He assumed the lowest position of a slave by exemplifying servanthood to the disciples – by washing their feet. He gave them an unforgettable lesson in humility, and by His actions rebuked their selfishness and pride.

A. SUBMISSION vs. SELFISHNESS

John 13:1-2 Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him,

I am sure that you all have noticed by now apostle John emphasizes the fact that Jesus lived on the “Heavenly itinerary” precisely as He was doing the Father’s will.

What was this divinely appointed “hour”? It was the time when He would be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view, it meant suffering, death, and defeat; but from the divine point of view, it meant glory.

When the servant of God is in the will of God, he is immortal until his work is done. The Jewish religious rulers could not even arrest Jesus, let alone kill Him, until the right hour had arrived.

Jesus made it clear to all of us that He loves every human being. It isn’t so much that Jesus’ love is different, rather the dynamic of the love relationship is different. The love of Jesus for His own followers is greater, because it has a response from them. In other words, love answers to love.

While Jesus was in complete submission to the Father’s will, Judas’ mind was heading to the path of the ultimate selfishness and self-destruction in full speed.

B. THE KING WHO WASHED THE FEET OF HIS SLAVES

John 13:3-5 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Two things we should keep in mind:

1) The roads were dusty.

With the exception of the highways and the main streets in Jerusalem, the majority of the streets in Israel were very dusty and muddy after rain.

2) They didn't wear shoes, rather open toe sandals, crude version of Birkenstock, if you will.

Because of these two reasons, the Israelites' feet were dirty whenever they went outside of their homes.

According to the famous painting "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci, Jesus and His disciples were sitting on their high back chairs and eating their last meal with Jesus at the dining room table; all conveniently facing the artist. Da Vinci obviously didn't do his homework in researching the ancient Israel custom.

The ancient Israelites would eat their formal meal like this one at a table that would be about the height of our coffee table, but in a U-shape. The guest would sit, and their status at the meal was reflected by how close they were seated to the host or leader of the meal. Because the table was low, they didn't sit on chairs like the da Vinci's painting, rather leaned on pillows, with their feet behind them.

I am sure that the Lord Jesus saw all of their dirty and dusty feet behind them, but His disciples were so busy arguing about who would sit on the throne next to Jesus in the kingdom which He would set up in the near future according to their plan that they didn't want to pick up a towel to wash others' feet.

If you were there and asked them about washing the feet of others, can you imagine what kind of answers you would get?

They all would say, "Oh yes, I would wash Jesus' feet, but not theirs."

Peter would say, "I AM NOT going to wash their feet. Remember, Jesus called me the rock. Besides, according to the future Catholics, I will be the first pope."

Thomas would pop in and say, "Yeah, whatever. I doubt that."

John would casually look around the room and say, "I don't care what you guys are thinking. I am the disciple whom Jesus loved. And most of all, I am going to write a book about tonight, I need to take some notes. You can wash my feet. I am busy."

Thomas would mumble again, "I doubt that, too."

Judas might wave his hands and say, "I will wash your feet if you pay me."

While Jesus was listening to their argument because of their pride and seeing their dirty feet, it was the perfect time for a divine display of humility that they would remember forever.

From v4 to v12, I find four very important principles we must learn and practice about humility. Please pay attention.

1) Humility is unannounced

John 13:4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.

The Greek word for humility is 'tapeinophrosyne'. It means, "the having a humble opinion of one's self; a deep sense of one's littleness." It also carried the idea of serving another person without any recognition in mind.

Did you notice that Jesus didn't whistle to get everyone's attention before He started to wash their feet? He, rather, rose quietly and laid aside His garments and started to wash them. Some of you can whistle, I mean 'WHISTLE'. Their whistles are so loud that it would wake up George Washington from his grave. When I try to whistle, it sounds like a deflated balloon spitting out the last portion of air.

Humility is the most beautiful and delicate flower in Christianity. Because as soon as it shows its exquisite beauty to others, it disappears immediately. The true humble man of God never says that he is humble, or never looks down on others over his nose because they are not spiritual like him. I have never seen anyone who thinks that he is humble, and mature in the Lord. As a matter of fact, it is the clearest evidence of spiritual immaturity of that person.

During my prison ministry, I've met an inmate who told me that he had a Th. D., which stands for Doctor of Theology and I pronounce it "THUD", and an ordained preacher. I don't know why he told me that information when I met him for the first time. The second time when I met him at the chapel service where I was teaching the Bible, he told me again about his degree and why he should preach. I guess that he wanted me to be impressed by him and his achievement. I don't think that the Lord was impressed by him and his pride at all.

The Word of God makes it very clear to us about true promotion.

Psalm 75:5-7 Do not lift up your horn on high; Do not speak with a stiff neck. 6 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. 7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

I really like the rendition of KJV for this verse:

Psalm 75:6 For promotion [cometh] neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. KJV

I believe that the Lord gives a great example of humility in nature. The branch most full of fruit bends the lowest. Greatness does not consist of self-exaltation and self-promotion, but self-sacrifice.

We can draw parallel between what the Lord Jesus is doing here and His work on our behalf:

- Jesus rose from supper, a place of rest and comfort
- Jesus rose from His throne in heaven, a place of rest and comfort

- Jesus laid aside His garments
- Jesus laid aside His glory before He came from heaven

- Jesus took a towel and girded Himself
- Jesus took the form of a slave – a man destined to die

- Jesus poured water into a basin, ready to clean
- Jesus poured out His blood to cleanse us from the guilt and penalty of sin

- Jesus sat down again after washing their feet
- Jesus sat down at the right hand of God the Father after cleansing us

2) Humility is willing to receive – without embarrassment

John 13:6-8 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" 7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing

you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” 8 Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

Tucking his feet under himself, Peter resisted the Lord. But his resistance only led to rebuke.

The false humility that takes the lowest place is just as hateful to God as the pride that takes the highest place. God is not impressed by our status in society or in the church. He is not a Respector of person’s intelligence, achievement, position, status, or wealth. He is not influenced by what people say or think about us, because He sees the thoughts and motives of the heart of every one of us.

After you do a good job for the Lord, when other brothers and sisters in Christ compliment you, don’t say, “It wasn’t me; it was the Lord.” We already know that. Just say, “Thank you. Praise the Lord.” It is the Lord who used you to bring glory to Himself. False humility secretly wants more praises from people for self-glorification, not for the Lord.

3) Humility is not a sign of weakness.

John 13:9-11 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” 11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”

In response to Jesus, Peter swung to the other side of the pendulum. Don’t laugh at Peter, because we often are very much like him.

When the sinner trusts the Savior, he is “bathed all over” and his sins are washed away and forgiven.

Hebrews 10:17-18 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.

However, as the believer walks in this world, it is easy to become defiled. He does not need to be bathed all over again; he simply needs to have that defilement cleansed away. God promises to cleanse us when we confess our sins to Him.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

4) Humility does not play favorites.

John 13:11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”

I wouldn’t be one bit surprised if Jesus was praying for each of the disciples as He washed their feet. But what about Judas’ feet? Yes, I believe that He prayed for Judas as well even though He knew that he would commit history’s worst act of treachery in a few short hours.

Doesn’t Jesus’ example tell us something special about humility? Doesn’t it remind us that we are not only called to serve those who actually like us, but also someone who is not so loveable? We are called to serve all people – the lovely and the unlovely, the friendly and the not-so-friendly. When was the last time you “washed the feet” of someone like Judas?

C. HUMILITY TO PRACTICE, NOT JUST TO KNOW

John 13:12-17 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. 16 Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

The world thinks that happiness is the result of others serving us, but real joy comes when we serve others in the name of Christ. The world is constantly pursuing happiness, but that is like chasing a shadow; it is always just beyond our reach.

Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God's paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy true happiness.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Humility must not be done in a selective or exclusive manner, serving one another, not just the Lord.
- 2) Happiness results from demonstrating humility, not just learning about it.
- 3) "It's difficult to stand on a pedestal and wash the feet of those below." *Chuck Colson*