

Session 1

March 6, 2022

A LIFE OF HUMBLE SERVICE

John 13:3-10,14-16

In my church, I have the privilege of teaching our youth on Wednesday nights. For the last several weeks, I have been highlighting one story from each chapter from the Gospel of John. Last Wednesday we made it to John 13, and I did something that shocked them: I took a basin of water and a towel, and I, Pastor Rich, washed their feet. Predictably, their reactions ranged from flat refusal to stunned silence. My mission was accomplished.

The act of footwashing is somewhat of a fascination to most of us. It's certainly not an ordinance like baptism or the Lord's supper, yet some churches practice it as if it is. We Baptists see it as homespun, folksy, and backwoods; and that's not fair either. Any adult who has ever participated in it has found it deeply moving. It certainly had enough significance in John 13 that Jesus used it to teach a simple but profound principle.

The action (vv. 3-5). The setting is the upper room, on the night that Jesus was betrayed. Following all the events of the last supper, Jesus astounded His disciples, not with His teaching, but with His actions. Unlike handwashing, which had everything to do with religious ceremony and nothing to do with dirty hands (see Mark 7:2), foot washing had no religious significance at all. It was born of necessity. We all know the dusty roads used for travel soiled the sandals worn and the feet that wore them. So, a basin of water was customarily made available at the entry way of a home for family and guests to use for cleaning their feet (see Luke 7:44). Families of means would offer the services of a servant or slave to carry out the menial task, especially when honored guests were received. The details of the event are significant. Laying aside His robe left Jesus in only a simple tunic, the ordinary dress of a slave. The towel wrapped around His waist indicated Jesus' position: He was at the disciples' feet, kneeling sufficiently low to the ground to wash and dry their feet. The act was humble to the point of humiliating, as the Lord moved the basin around the circle of men reclining there. Even Judas, the one who would betray Him, received the humble service Christ offered. For reflection: *Can you think of the times in the Bible when Jesus had His feet washed? What did His disciples say about it? What was Jesus' reaction?*

The reaction (vv. 6-11). As predictable as the disciples' silence, was Peter's outburst. Those with deep emotions feel deeply and react strongly, and so it was with Peter. Every word has some emphasis. In essence, Peter asked, "How can you, the Lord, serve me, a sinner, in such a menial manner?" It's notable that Jesus did not really rebuke him, but rather attempted to soothe him, telling him to wait a bit (v. 7). Peter, not willing to accept this mild rebuke refused the service altogether. Jesus' reply now is much stronger, as Peter was in danger of missing the point Jesus was trying to make entirely. But that Peter might be left out of the Lord's graces was unacceptable! "Ok, if that's the case," Peter essentially says, "I want it all! Not just my feet, but all of me!" (v. 9). In verse 10, Jesus shifts the focus subtly from *humility* to *salvation*. Peter didn't need a bath; he had already been cleansed. Only the parts of him that played in the dirt

needed to be washed. For reflection: *Can you think of other applications to Jesus' statement to Peter in verse 10? What parts of our own lives continually play in the dirt?*

The lesson (vv. 12-16). Once the drama with Peter had played out, Jesus returned to the group as a whole, and to the central lesson He was trying to convey. It is summarized in verses 14 and 15: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done for you." The act is not an ordinance given to the church, but rather an object lesson given to followers of Christ, that we humbly serve one another. For reflection: *What exactly is an ordinance? Why does this example not fit the criteria? Does that make the lesson less important?*