



JESUS' DEITY REVEALED • JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES FEET •
JOHN 13:1-17 • 03/25/2018

MAIN POINT

Jesus has demonstrated for us how to humbly serve one another so that our selfishness might be replaced with selflessness.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who are some of the most influential leaders in your life? What led you to admire them as you do?

What traits do such influential leaders share in common? What traits are unique to them?

The list of qualities and characteristics that influential leaders possess is seemingly endless. Trustworthiness, charisma, and vision are among many others that come to mind

when describing great leaders. Less often, however, do we use words like “dependent” or “modest.” Yet it is these and similar traits that Jesus insists must define great Christian leaders—they are to be defined by humility. It’s not just leaders, but each of us, who are called to a life of humble service.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

■ HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:1-5.

Prior to the Feast of the Passover, and in the presence of Judas who was to betray Him, Jesus took on the garb and posture of a slave and washed His disciples’ feet.

How does Jesus’ washing of His disciples’ feet serve as an act of love “to the end?” Why do you think John chooses to emphasize the presence of Judas in this foot-washing scene? Does it surprise you that Judas was there for the foot-washing? Why or why not?

Does the fact that Jesus washed even Judas’ feet have any special impact on the significance of this event for you? Why or why not?

Whether “to the end” means that Jesus loved His disciples “to the uttermost” or “to the end of his life,” the emphasis is still the same. In washing His disciples’ feet, Jesus displayed his unstoppable love for His own, and the washing of His disciples’ feet, even the feet of Judas, would not be the most dramatic demonstration of that love. That would come at the cross.

Why do you think John described Jesus in such powerful terms in v. 3?

What is the relationship between Jesus as He is described in v. 3 and the role He took as a foot-washing slave in v. 4?

What might have been going through the disciples' minds as their Lord removed his outer clothing and began to wash their feet? What might such an act have done to the dynamic of the room during a shared meal?

With the power to rule the universe, Jesus willingly chose to take on the form and function of a lowly slave, rather than use His power to thwart God's will for His life. He could have destroyed Judas, His betrayer, but He chose to serve him instead. He could have demanded that the disciples serve Him, yet He chose to model humble service for them and for us.

■ HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:6-11.

How would you describe Peter's response to Jesus' actions? How do you think you would have responded? Why?

Why are profound acts of humility frequently admired as much as they are despised?

What motivation does Jesus know must lead Peter to have his feet washed (v. 7)?

What, if anything, is significant about Peter's request that Jesus wash his hands and head as well?

Though Peter initially responds with indignation, faith in and love for Jesus leads him to submit to Jesus' humble act. Jesus' statement to Peter in v. 8 ("If I don't wash you, you have no part with Me.") conveys a powerful idea in its immediate context, but also foreshadows the washing believers experience by Jesus' blood poured out on the cross. In both instances, the exalted Messiah King assumes the role of a despised servant for the good of others. While some theorize that Peter's reference to the washing of his hands may be a reference to ritual cleanliness, and "head" as a reference to his perceived need for total cleansing, most scholars see no special significance in Peter's statement. True to his personality, Peter was verbally unrestrained in his enthusiasm.

■ HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 13:12-17.

Having completed the act of washing His disciples' feet, Jesus converses with them about the meaning of His actions. Jesus has set for them an example of humble service which must be reflected in their own lives.

Consider Jesus' question to His disciples in v. 12. Do you think they understood what He had just done and why? Do you understand?

What excuses might the disciples have made for not wanting to follow Jesus' example? What excuses do we tend to make? What do these excuses reveal about our hearts?

No student has the right to think he is exempt from the same responsibilities his teacher willingly takes on. So it is for Jesus and His disciples. As He served them, so they must serve themselves and others.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Thinking about the relationships in your life, how can you practically “wash their feet?”

Who is someone who serves you like this? What can you do to thank them this week?

PRAY

Praise God for the work of Christ and His example of service, love, and humility. Thank Him that Jesus was willing to humble Himself in love for you. Ask God to help you reflect daily His humility as you live out the gospel in your relationships, and that by doing so, others would be drawn to Jesus.

COMMENTARY

JOHN 13:1-17

13:1. The time had come, and Jesus would soon leave this world. This term for “world” appears 185 times in the New Testament; 8 times in Matthew; 3 times in Mark, 3 in Luke; but 78 in the Gospel of John. The other two key words are time and love.

13:2. Judas typifies a society in rebellion against God, but the Lord’s treatment also demonstrates God’s grace and compassion with that society. Though the disciples never grasped Judas’ true nature until after the betrayal in the garden, Jesus knew it from the beginning. Yet He gave Judas every opportunity to turn from his wicked ways, repent, and follow his Lord. John pulled no punches in his description of the betrayer and his evil master. In a few more verses (v. 27) we read that “Satan entered into him.”

13:3–5. Verse 3 reminds us that Jesus was the omnipotent God. Jesus allowed the full scenario to play out as the errant disciple made choice after choice leading to his suicide. Some interpreters take these words symbolically, making the water equal to the Word, the towel demonstrating righteousness, and so forth. That hardly seems necessary in light of the culture of the first century. An old proverb says, “Actions speak louder than words,” and the Lord’s willingness to wash the feet of His disciples, even Judas’s, reflects servant leadership at its best. People who are familiar with first-century culture will immediately recognize how socially inappropriate this behavior was. Never in Jewish, Greek, or Roman society would a superior wash the feet of inferiors.

13:6–7. Little discussions with Peter fill the synoptic Gospels, and John enjoys recording them as well. Shocked by the cultural reversal as he literally looked down at his Lord, Peter said in effect, “What’s going on here?” And Jesus replied, “You have no idea, but some day

you will.” Presumably Jesus began the foot-washing with Peter, so he was the first to be shocked.

13:8–9. Peter was too humble to have his feet washed, but not too humble to command the Lord. As soon as Jesus emphasized that this symbolic act united the disciple with the Lord in some significant way, Peter took the full plunge. Let us not miss the practical theology of these verses. There is no place in the body of Christ for those who have not been cleansed by the Lord. Washing in this symbolic context cannot refer to baptism, but the atoning cleansing of sin.

13:10–11. Here we have a beautiful picture of forgiveness and one of the most important theological texts of the New Testament. How often does a person need to be saved? Once? Every time he or she sins? Just before death to make sure? These verses tell us that a person who has been completely cleansed once will only require regular washings after that. A full bathing depicts initial regeneration; the repeated washings symbolize forgiveness of ongoing sinful behavior.

13:12–14. The washing not only demonstrated humility and servanthood to the disciples, but also laid an experiential foundation for the teaching of verse 10. When the foot-washing ended, Jesus taught an important lesson about the relationship of believers—you also should wash one another’s feet. Jesus emphasized the words Teacher and Lord in contrast with the way they had behaved toward Him. The Lord reminded them that He washed their feet as their leader.

13:15–17. Throughout the New Testament, we learn the importance of example, never more so than when Jesus refers to Himself. But here we are not focused on some great spiritual reality or doctrinal truth; the passage deals with how we treat other people. Since Jesus loved His disciples and loves us in the same way, we need to do for others what He has done for us.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

John 15:1-11

