

## John 12 and 13 Washing Feet

In John chs 12 and 13 things start moving towards a climax. It's Passover time again. In the earlier chapters Jesus said His time had not yet come but here He announces, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified...I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.'

His followers have been marvelling at Him healing disabled people, walking on water, giving sight to the blind, even raising the dead. They've had a dinner in His honour in Bethany where He raised Lazarus, and crowds have initially welcomed Him to the capitol Jerusalem. Here comes the king who heals the sick and raises the dead! Their hopes are high for national revival, political reform and celebration of renewed prosperity.

But He says His greatest glory will be in suffering crucifixion for the sins of the world, reconciling people to God and Himself rising to bring them to eternal life.

Although he has spoken plainly about this and despite the threatening opposition of the Pharisees, His disciples seem determined to carry on with their optimistic agenda of popular prestige. Only Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus seems to have an inkling of what is really happening. She has been His star pupil, sitting at His feet, listening carefully. She senses this is probably the last time Jesus will be their guest so in a beautiful act of extravagant devotion she anoints Him with expensive perfume in preparation for burial.

Chs 13 -17 now take us to the upper room and give us an intimate inside track of Jesus' last conversation with His twelve disciples before His arrest. If we thought it was amazing in ch11 to see the Son of God cry in the cemetery with His friends, it gets even more astounding here. John gives more detail than the other gospel writers, describing how Jesus not only shared His food with His companions, using the bread and wine as symbols of His approaching sacrifice, He actually knelt like a slave on the floor and washed their feet!

We need to understand eastern people have a thing about feet. Feet are considered the most offensive part of the body. You need to be careful not to show anyone the sole of your foot for that would be considered an insult. It's as if you're saying that person is beneath you, contemptible like the dirt sticking to the bottom of your shoe. This makes sense of references such as 'shaking the dust off one's feet' as a rebuke and warning, or 'tossing one's sandal' over enemy territory. Eastern people would never touch each other's feet, or hardly stoop to wash their own. They would get servants to do this most demeaning task.

So get this. The Son of God kneels like a slave in the dust and bathes the *feet* of those who are still failing to grasp and embrace His mission, who in a few short hours will desert Him, deny they know Him, even betray Him!

See here the essence of greatness.

The story is told of a sick child in Northern Ireland who urgently needed airlifted to a hospital in England. An RAF helicopter was commissioned for the job, but imagine the parents surprise when on this occasion it was piloted by non other than HRH Prince William!

Greatness is not being born into power and authority, it is gladly using whatever we have, whatever we've been given to serve and show kindness.

Christians celebrate the royal Prince of Heaven, Who came down among us to be our Saviour!

Right from ch1, John has been compiling a catalogue of events he has personally witnessed to display the wonder that is Jesus the Christ. He's the eternal 'Word', co-creator of everything, source of all light and life. He is divine, the Son of God, one with the Father. He commands the weather, feeds the multitude, raises the dead. He is entrusted with judgement for there is no higher authority. Yet He is come 'in the flesh', making His home among us, providing wine for the wedding, weeping at the graveside, sharing our table and food. And now begins the greatest demonstration of His love as He washes His disciples' feet.

This speaks many deep lessons to people of faith, let me suggest three.

Perhaps most obviously this speaks of humility, the Lord of all condescending, bending down to serve his creation. In Matthew 20 Jesus' disciples are vying for positions of honour and He tells them, 'whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.'

At the Last Supper the Master demonstrates this by doing this most menial of services for His disciples. And He makes it plain that this is the example Christians are to follow, 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'

The Apostle Paul echoes this some years later in his letter to the Philippians ch2: 'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility

consider others better than yourselves...Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!'

Which brings us to the next thing. Jesus washing these men's feet speaks to us not just of humility but of *grace*. When Peter, a little too proud, embarrassed and offended, protests, Jesus makes it plain that we all need to be cleansed by Him to be His followers. He gave His life on the cross to atone for our sins, that we might be cleansed of their guilt and pardoned from their penalty. He does for us what we do not deserve, what we can never earn. Why?

And that's the third thing. This speaks to us of humility, grace and redeeming *love*. Jesus did these remarkable things because He loves us. He chose and chooses still to show saving kindness to those who have treated God and His laws with contempt, who have repeatedly offended the Holy One with our sinful disobedience. We deserve Hell, but Jesus offers us Heaven, because He loves us.

What else can we do but thankfully trust Him? And with every part of our poor, broken, miserable little hearts love Him back, and serve Him by serving each other and all people in His name.

'Lord of eternity dwells in humanity, kneels in humility and washes our feet.  
What a mystery, (such) meekness and majesty!  
(We) bow down and worship, for this is (our) God!

Amen