

John 13

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Date: 18 July 2010

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[0 : 00] Can you turn back in your Bibles, please, to John chapter 13, and to the section of this chapter that we read, where Jesus was washing the feet of his disciples.

I want to begin this morning by thinking about our hands. There are some people in this world who maintain that they can find out about our personality and find out a little bit about our background by looking at our hands.

Now, I'm not talking about those people who think they can tell the future by looking at your hands. Obviously, that's nonsense. But I'm talking about people who think that by analyzing the palm of your hand, they can learn about you. I mean, in here today, some of you will have hands like mine, which are very soft.

You can tell that I push pens and various things like that. And others of you will have hands that are maybe kind of rougher and used to real work or manual work, depending on what definition you wish to give to it.

But our hands reveal something about what we're like. Now, I want to think for a moment about the hands of Jesus. It was a custom in the time of Jesus for certainly boys to grow up in the occupation that their family were associated with.

[1 : 21] So, Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a carpenter. And in all likelihood, Jesus would have been from an early age helping Joseph with the carpentry.

And from whatever point, we believe Joseph died at some point before the ministry of Jesus began, that Jesus would have been used to manual labor with his hands.

So, the hands of Jesus would have revealed something of the work that he was engaged in. But when his public ministry began, the hands of Jesus took on a different role.

For instance, the hands of Jesus touched the untouchable. You think of the amount of lepers that Jesus' hands touched. Now, if you came across somebody with leprosy, they had to call out to say that they were a leper, to draw attention to themselves so that you could beat a hasty retreat in the opposite direction.

But Jesus, his hands reached out, touched, and healed. His hands also took bread on a number of occasions, broke bread, and fed.

[2 : 25] His hands, above all, were marked permanently by the work that he was going to accomplish on the cross. And so, the hands of Jesus have a piercing through them that directs us to the cross at Calvary.

But here in this passage, we find something different about Jesus, because Jesus, in this passage, is getting his hands dirty. He's getting his hands dirty because he's dealing with the dusty and dirty feet of his disciples.

And he's going to wash the feet of his disciples. He's going to perform the task that the lowest-ranking servant would perform.

Now, later on in the New Testament, in one of the letters that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, it describes Jesus there as not only being in the form of God, not only being God and having all the essential attributes that make God, God, but it also says that he had the form of a servant, and he took the form of a servant.

And in this chapter, we have the clearest illustration, if you like, of the servanthood of Jesus. And for a few moments this morning, I want us to unpack the teaching of this passage so that we can be directed to Jesus, and we can be directed to what Jesus says to you and to me this morning.

[3 : 54] I want us to notice two or three things about what we learn in this passage about Jesus from his actions. The first thing I want us to be aware of is that Jesus loves.

Look at verse 1. It tells us there very clearly, Jesus loved his own who were in the world, and he now showed them the full extent of his love.

This verse is not simply an introduction to what goes on in John chapter 13. This, in many ways, is a heading that you look at the rest of the gospel of John in the light of this verse, because it introduces us to how Jesus is going to show the full extent of his love.

It's not simply confined to washing the feet of his disciples, but it's all that's going to be involved in the hours that'll pass until on that cross he pays the final price and the final penalty for our sins.

And so it doesn't just dominate this chapter, this verse, it dominates the rest of the book. And so we learn here that Jesus, that he loves, he's going to show in the next number of moments in this passage, he's going to show that love in practice, and then he's going to expound, he's going to explain what that love is in principle.

[5 : 10] And so he's showing this love, though, to a particular people. And the people are described here in verse 1 as his own. He's describing a people who are separate, a people who are different, because they're a people who belong to Jesus.

And the people who he describes as his own are the people he knows in the next number of hours are going to let him down in a spectacular way.

He knows their world is going to crumble. He knows that they are going to crumble with it. He knows they are going to be confused, that their initial reaction to what's going to take place is to run, is to flee, and to leave him alone, on his own, to face all that's going to come in the providence and in the plan of God.

And so we're here directed by John, the writer of this gospel, to the love that Jesus has for the very people who are going to let him down, for the very people who are weak, for the very people who are trembling and who will be trembling, for the very people who will be hiding.

Jesus shows his love for them. Is it not among the most amazing truths of Scripture that our Savior loves his weak, trembling, confused people?

[6 : 45] Some of us in here today are weak and we're confused and we're trembling as his people. We don't know why things are happening, but we can rest assured that this passage tells us Jesus loves his own.

Some of us in here, all of us in here of God's people, we have failed Jesus. And he knows how in the future we will fail him. But that doesn't take away his love for his own people.

This is all the more remarkable, considering it's not simply his disciples who are in for a number of hours that's going to leave their lives rocked, shell-shocked, because Jesus himself is going to face a far greater ordeal than the disciples.

Because it's Jesus who, in a number of hours, is going to be suffering. It's Jesus who's going to be there on the cross, that shameful cross. It's Jesus who's going to be sin-bearing.

And yet Jesus is not taken up with himself. He's taken up with the needs of his people. Now, when you and I are unwell, and when we are stressed, when we're anxious, we find it very hard to think of the needs of other people, because we become self-absorbed.

- [8 : 12] Well, Jesus was facing the climax of his ministry. With all that would be involved in that ministry reaching its climax, and he is here showing his love for his disciples, for his own. Now, I said a moment or two ago that his own are a people who are marked out. They are a people who Jesus is going to mention around 40 times in the next two or three chapters. Some of you will know that in the Gospel of John, as you read it from the start, you come across a number of different themes. You come across a theme of light. You come across a theme of life. You come across a theme of God's timing. You also come across, from this point onwards, the theme of his own people. And his own people are those who have been taken out of an anti-Christian, anti-God community. So when Jesus prays later on in John 17, verse 15 and 16, he's not meaning that we are physically taken out of the world as such at the moment, but that we are different.
- [9 : 23] My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Jesus says his own people, we're in the world, but we're not of the world, because we're different. When in John 3, 16, it says that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, the showing, the proof of his loving the world was to take a people out of the world, to take his own from the world, so that they would be separate, that they would be God's special people, that they would be God's own people, that they would belong to God. And so the people who belong to God, the people who are called by God to follow after God, are those who in this passage and those today whom Jesus loves. The second thing I want us to notice here is the power of Jesus. Look with me, if you would, at verse 3. It says that Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So we're being directed here to the power that Jesus possesses. And when we look at a statement like this from maybe an earthly point of view, we think of the power at Jesus' disposal and we think, well, surely there would be some kind of immediate and flashy confrontation to use this power to obliterate Judas, to obliterate the devil as the enemy of the enemy of Jesus, to use this power once and for all to destroy them right here, right now.
- [11 : 17] Because if Jesus has power at his disposal, then he had power to deal with Judas. He had power to deal with the devil. But here, it is saying that this power that he possesses, this power that will be his, is a power that's not going to be exercised until later. Because Jesus, instead of coming at Judas with this unstoppable divine wrath, instead bends down before him and takes his dirty, dusty feet and he starts washing the feet of Judas. Conscious of what's going on with Judas, he washes the feet of the one he had the power to destroy. And of course, Jesus is conscious here of his identity. He's conscious as to how he possesses this power. He's aware that he is intrinsically linked to God, that they are one. That he has come from God, he's going back to God because that's his identity. He is the Son of God. And as the Son of God, he has this power.
- [12 : 40] And with this power at his disposal, what does he do? He goes on his knees and he starts washing the feet of the one who's going to betray him. So Jesus loves. Jesus, his power. And thirdly, I want us to notice here, something about the humility of Jesus. I suppose it's one of these things in our own society that maybe the social conventions that were established over many, many decades are becoming less.

In trying to think of some of the social conventions we have, I kind of thought of, well, you know, if you're sitting at a dinner table and there's guests there, you don't start eating until there's, you know, everyone's seated and they've all got their own food in front of them.

And it's one of the kind of unspoken conventions of our society, or certainly it was. Well, in the time of Jesus, one of the unspoken conventions, one of the things that you would just take for granted because it would be done automatically, was when you would come in from being outside and you would come to eat a meal, it was expected that there would be there somebody who would wash your feet.

Because those of you who've been to the Middle East know how dusty your feet get. Even wearing some Western footwear, your feet still get dusty. So you can imagine what it was like in sandals.

[14 : 03] But in the room that Jesus and his disciples were going to be meeting that evening, there was no servant provided in the room. The owner of the room made sure he provided a bowl with water to deal with this particular ritual.

But there was nobody who was there to actually perform this ritual. And so I want you to picture in your minds the disciples entering this room. And down on the floor you have this picture of water.

And the disciples kind of walk in, they look about, it's an empty room, and they just see this water and they all trundle past it. You know, there's Andrew and then there's Peter and there's Matthew. They all go past it.

They look at this thing and wonder what's going to happen. Because really, you know, as they looked among themselves, well, we're equals here as disciples, so I'm not going to wash the feet of somebody who's equal to me.

But then when Jesus walks into the room, they're not equal to Jesus. But none of them gets up and starts coming to Jesus and to wash his feet.

[15 : 08] Part of the issue, or part of the answers to why this took place, is given to us in Luke's account of what was happening immediately before this. In Luke chapter 22, we're told that walking along, the disciples had a really fascinating conversation topic.

The conversation topic was, who's the greatest? Which one of us is the greatest? And you can think of, well, you know, Peter, or is it John, or is it Andrew, or is it...

Or who is it? Who's the greatest? And they come into this room, and they're all going to sit down there, and none of them is going to show any weakness. None of them is going to go and start washing the feet of each other.

But more than that, none of them is going to come and wash the feet of their master. And so Jesus takes charge of the situation. And he goes, he takes the water, John describes it here, verse 4, he describes it, you know, very clearly.

Jesus, he got up, he took off his outer clothing, he wrapped a towel around his waist, he poured the water into a basin, he began to wash. At any point in what was taking place here, the disciples must have known what was happening, but at any point they could have stood up and said, no, Jesus, this isn't for you.

[16 : 20] Let us do this. But no, they didn't. And so Jesus carried on, and he performed this act that the lowest slave would perform. Now, what I want us to be aware of here is that when it describes us, when John describes the actions of Jesus, you know, taking off his outer clothing, and then carrying on with this ritual of washing the feet of the disciples, I want to draw your attention to, to how that is a symbol, how that's an illustration of the whole work of Jesus.

Because what Jesus has effectively done by coming into this world is that he's taken off this outer cloak of the heavenly glory that belongs to him.

And he's taking this form of a servant, he's taking this role of a servant, and he's not doing it in a half-hearted manner, he's going to perform it as he ought to, he's going to perform it diligently.

But the whole taking off of the garment here is an illustration of Jesus' voluntarily lean to one side the glory and the reverence and the recognition and the worship that he had in heaven.

He put that to one side so that he could come along a path that would lead to the ultimate humiliation on the cross of Calvary.

[17 : 51] And he did that for you and for me. So we have Jesus who loves, we have Jesus who has power, and we have Jesus who is humble enough to wash the feet of his disciples, to teach them a lesson, but to, above all, put off the heavenly recognition that was his, the heavenly clothing, the heavenly glory that was his so he could go on that path that would lead to the ultimate humiliation on the cross.

And so basically, you think of the humility and the humiliation of Jesus. Well, if that's what we learn about Jesus from this passage, what do we learn about ourselves?

How can we tie this passage into our lives today? Well, I think there's two things that we can learn from this passage for our lives this morning. The first is this.

According to Jesus, we need to be cleansed. According to Jesus, we need to be cleaned. thankfully, Peter appears to be the only disciple that's referred to here who wants to draw a halt to what's going on here.

Because for Peter, Jesus has, he's done enough. You know, he's proved his point. You know, we should have gone up, I should have gone up, says Peter, or thinks Peter, I should have done this myself.

[19 : 25] You've proved your point, Jesus. You don't come. You don't wash my feet. I mean, come on, Jesus, you are my master. I've said that you are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God.

You are the one who is so holy. You are the one who is healed, who teaches in a way that nobody else ever has. You cannot, says Peter, you cannot wash my feet.

And of course, the conversation then develops between Jesus and Peter from verse 6 onwards. And you've got the back to and fro. Peter says, no, Jesus says, I must.

Well, Peter says, well, if you must, then I want you to, can I wash the whole of me? And of course, Jesus then answers this. And so you say, well, what does this conversation say to us? Well, it tells us here that for Peter, if he did not accept Jesus' humiliation or the humility of Jesus being shown in this particular work of washing his feet, how was he going to accept the greater humiliation of Jesus upon the cross at Calvary?

If Peter couldn't picture the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior, washing the feet of his disciples, how could he picture the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior upon a cross with a body that's covered in blood and is bruised and is hanging there with its joints being dislocated, the kind of muscles being pulled, hanging there, you know, the weight of gravity bearing down upon him, blood dripping from the feet of Jesus and how could he possibly respond to that humiliation of Jesus if he couldn't respond to Jesus acting in this particular way of, this particularly humble manner in which he washed his feet?

[21 : 20] You see, in some ways, what Peter suggests in his speech here or in his conversation is that, you know, he almost doesn't need Jesus to deal with him in this way.

He doesn't need for Jesus to clean him in this way. When, of course, what's taken here is, what's going on here is just a pointer to the greater cleansing that's going to take place, that Peter did need his feet to be cleansed because they were dirty, they were dusty.

Above all, Peter did need his heart to be cleansed because it was corrupt and it needed to be purified and the only way it could be done was through the work of Jesus. And so for Peter to turn around and to reject this work, it's to turn around and say to Jesus, no, I don't need to be cleansed by you, Jesus, because I'm doing fine the way I am.

I don't need you to work in this particular way. You have that similar kind of mindset today when you speak to folks in work or in your family, your friends or whatever and they turn around and say to you, well, I didn't ask for Jesus to die for me.

I didn't ask for Jesus to go through this whole process on the cross just for me. I'm fine, he didn't need to do this. If he did this, it wasn't for me because I don't have that need.

[22 : 35] In the conversation between Peter and Jesus, Jesus makes it clear to Peter that every single one of us has the need of being cleansed. Now, Peter, like so many of us, like myself, goes from one extreme to the other.

Faced with the prospect of having no part with Jesus in verse 9, verse 8, then Peter says, no, just wash me completely. Head to toe. Peter says, Jesus says, you don't need that.

I just need to wash your feet. So what is Jesus saying? Jesus is saying that somebody who trusts in him, somebody who looks to him and to him alone as their sole hope for heaven, is someone who has received a once and for all cleansing of their heart.

That's why he goes on and says in verse 10 that you are clean. When someone comes to trust in Jesus, they are cleansed.

Their heart is purified. Their sins are forgiven. They are accepted by God. What Jesus is speaking about here with the feet needing to be washed is that even although we have been cleansed as the people of God, we still sin.

[23 : 59] And what do we do with that sin? I mean, those of you in here who maybe don't have a faith, don't have a saving interest in Jesus, you can point to Christians you know and if you knew me you could point to me and you could say, well, look at that guy's life.

You know, that's not the way it should be. And I would say, yes, that's not the way I should be because I am still a sinner. I have been cleansed but I still sin.

So what do I do with the sin that I commit every day? Well, I go like the disciples to get my feet washed by Jesus. I go for that daily wash from Jesus.

I go to Jesus asking for that forgiveness on a daily basis. And the basis that we can get that daily forgiveness is set because of the once for all cleansing that Jesus has given to our heart by taking all the penalty of our sins on that cross and dealing with it once and for all.

So Jesus says to Peter, those of you who trust in me, those of you who are mine, those of you who belong to me, you're clean. I've washed you.

[25 : 16] You still sin. So you need to come back daily to get your feet washed by me. And so that in effect tells us that every one of us in here today needs to be cleansed by Jesus.

Whether it is for the first time to have our hearts dealt with before a holy God, there is none of us in here who can claim to have kept the standard that God has set, the standard that God wants us to live our lives by.

None of us can claim to have met that standard. We have missed that target. We've not just missed it once, we've missed it on a super abundant number of occasions.

We have missed the target that God has set. And so for every one of these failings, every one of these sins, every one of these rebellions, every one of these rejections, we need to be cleansed.

And the only way you can be cleansed is through Jesus. And then there's those of us who are God's people. And even in this morning itself, how many thoughts have gone through our minds that we wish hadn't.

[26 : 35] Some of the things we've said to people and we're sitting here thinking, I really wish I didn't say that today. Some of the things we've already done this morning, we go back for cleansing to the one who has cleansed our heart.

We go back to Jesus. So Jesus sees, first of all, to you and to me, that we need to be cleansed and he can clean us. Secondly, and finally, he tells us that we need to learn humility.

The thrust in this passage gives us an example again from Jesus as to how to live. He gives an example of what true leadership actually is.

He gives us an example of not standing on our rights, not thinking of ourselves being so important, but being willing to be humble and to deal with others in a way that we ought to.

You know, I think it's part of human nature that we tend to kind of mark ourselves in relation to other people. You know, we tend to kind of think, well, you know, I'm maybe not like this person, I'm maybe a wee bit more like that person.

[27 : 47] And Jesus here, who, as the perfect God-man, the one man who had never sinned, the man who never even had a single stray thought in his mind, here he submits himself to the lowest task of the lowest servant as a lesson for his people.

And there's a promise contained God-man. He said, I'm going to be blessed to him. He's blessed to him. He's blessed to our lives, then we'll be blessed by him.

And so Jesus tells us that we need to be cleansed by him. He tells us that we need to learn humility. humility. We need to learn about ourselves.

We need to place ourselves and esteem others better than ourselves. And we're to let that approach permeate our lives. But that approach goes completely against our natural way that we operate.

Because it doesn't tie in with how we view ourselves. But Jesus says that he has set us an example. And as his people, the example that he sets is an example we must, by his grace, seek to follow.

[29 : 16] So what have we seen from this passage? We've seen that Jesus loves. He loves his own, even when they're weak and failing.

He loves his own, even when he knows what's going to happen to them. He loves his own, even when he had so much going on in his own life. Jesus loves. Jesus has power because of who he is.

He is the very son of God. He is the one who has come from God. He's come from glory. He'll go to Golgotha and he'll go back to glory and he'll be hyper exalted there.

Jesus is humble, voluntarily taking off the glory that belonged to him, like he took off the outer robe to perform this task of a servant. He did the same for us.

And he says to us today, he says to me today, and he says to you today, he says, you need to be cleansed. And he says, I can do it. And he says, those of you who have been cleansed, you need to follow my example and live a life that would be humble.

[30 : 25] We began by thinking about Jesus' hands and the different situations that Jesus, his hands were used. Here we've been focusing on Jesus' hands being dirty.

dirty hands wasn't enough for you and for me. Because Jesus' hands, they had to be bloody.

Because merely washing the feet of his disciples would not save them or us. His hands had to be pierced. His feet had to be pierced.

His side had to be pierced. His forehead had to be pierced. by thorns. His back had to be ripped to shreds.

His body had to be battered. His face had to be spattered. His beard had to be pulled out.

[31 : 28] And that wasn't even the worst of it. Because the worst of it beyond the physical pain, beyond the shame and the abuse he would take, would be calling out to his father.

And because he took my place in that cross, and your place in that cross, there was no answer. God's heart.

Because the father had turned his back on the son. Not permanently. The son was unaware of the father's felt presence and encouragement. That was the worst of it.

He faced God's anger against our sin, God's wrath, his holy hatred against our sin, so we'd never have to. So while a passage like this reminds us of Jesus' hands being dirty, we don't leave it there.

Because remember what we said about verse one, it's an introduction to the rest of the gospel, it's an introduction to his hands being bloody for you and for me.

[32 : 38] And he who had these hands that were bloody invites you to come to him today and to confess your need of him today and to ask him to take control of your life, to cleanse you from all that's going on in your heart and mind and to draw you to him.

And the wonder of the gospel message is this, he has given you a promise. He said whoever you are, whatever you've done, whatever's going on in your life, if you come to me, I will never, ever turn you away.

That is the gospel message today. Jesus bids you to come to him and to know him as your Lord and Savior. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we pray that you would give to us a sense of how humble we ought to be, of how we need to esteem others better than ourselves.

Father, you know that we need your help for this. And we pray that you would humble us as we meditate, as we think about the example that Jesus has set, that it would not simply be words that we think about for this half hour in church today, but that there would be words that would impact our life today and tomorrow and the next day and for the rest of our lives until you call us home.

[34 : 25] Help us to follow that example. Help us to come to our Savior day by day with confession on our lips, seeking to have that cleansing once again.

We confess, Father, that there are so many things we don't want to do and that's what we end up doing. And what we do want to do, we so struggle to do that. And we thank you that we receive acceptance in your sight because of that once for all cleansing that Jesus has given.

And so we pray that we would rejoice in him today, that we would worship him, that we would love him, and that we would serve him. We pray this in his name. Amen.