

### Exegesis

**Vs. 6-8** – Though the rest of the disciples remained silent, there was one who could not be still. John says, "Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" In Greek, the term "thou" is immediately followed by the word "my," providing a sharp contrast between the two.<sup>1</sup> This syntax illustrates Peter's disgust.<sup>2</sup> The disciple was sickened by this demonstration. But, before we cast judgment, we should remember how foot-washing was perceived during this time (*see notes*, vs. 4-5). It was likely everyone was having a similar reaction.<sup>3</sup> Peter was the only one to actually said something.

Admittedly, Peter was always the most outspoken of the disciples. Sometimes, this worked in his favor (cf. Matt. 16:13-20), but other times, it invited condemnation (cf. Matt. 16:21-23). But primarily, Peter's disposition provided a helpful contrast to any given situation. Because he was so forthcoming with his own thoughts, this gave Jesus an opportunity to further elaborate on what he was trying to accomplish. And though he is still illustrative of Proverbs 29:11, Peter should also be thanked for his candor. Our faith is richer because he took an opportunity to speak when others remained silent, such as here.

The Lord tries to mollify Peter by assuring him, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." Like with Peter's "thou" and "me," Jesus' "I" and "thou" are emphatically placed, indicating the Lord matched Peter's tone.<sup>4</sup> It seems Peter was treading on dangerous ground. The Lord would not abide by such deviance.

**Vs. 8-9** – Even though the situation was getting heated, Peter still refused to yield to Jesus. He even doubled-downed his protest by saying, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." And, in this, the most outspoken apostle spoke too much. He, a disciple, was now acting as an authority over his own master and trying to forbid Jesus from doing something. And while we can sympathize, this was a step too far. Even though driven by good intentions, a follower of God should never presume to tell the Son of God what to do.

Unsurprisingly, Jesus refused to relinquish his authority to Peter. Just as he would not bow before the cultural convention, he would not bow to one of his own disciples. But, ever-patient and understanding, the Lord knows what will persuade Peter. And so Jesus says, "If I wash thee

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<sup>1</sup> Morris (1995), p. 548, translates it as, "Lord, do you my feet wash?" Carson (1991), p. 463, translates it as "Are you going to wash my feet?"

<sup>2</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 405.

<sup>3</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> Klink (2016), p. 579.

not, thou hast no part with me.” This response is nonsensical if Jesus only had in mind the actual foot-washing and not something more.<sup>5</sup> And though Peter was still confused, as his comments will soon prove, he, at least, understood that whatever Jesus was doing safeguarded his relationship with the Lord. He would not want to jeopardize that.

So, Peter finally concedes to Jesus. He says, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." If a little bit of washing was good, then more washing would be even better, or so the disciple thought. Even from this response, it is clear that he had no clue what Jesus was doing. But, at the very least, his words demonstrated how much Peter wanted to be a part of Jesus' life. Within a few moments, the lead disciple went from being appalled to outright defiant to being ready to abandon propriety altogether. Say what you will about Peter, but if there's one thing no one would've questioned, it would be his loyalty to Jesus. And this makes his later denial even more heartbreaking (cf. 13:36-38; Lu. 22:54-62).

**Vs. 10-11** – Jesus now explains the meaning behind his actions: “He that is washed needeth not [to wash again] save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit...” While today, bathing is (mostly) done for hygienic reasons, in the first century, a person would wash for one of two reasons: first, bathing imparted a ceremonial "cleanness" (cf. 11:55; Ex. 19:10-11; 40:12-15; Num. 8:5-7; Lev. 17:15), and, second, washing was expected of guests attending a banquet, per social etiquette (cf. Lu. 11:37-41). So, in other words, it was customary for individuals to be as clean as possible whenever attending a dinner party of any kind; this would've especially been the case during something like the Passover.<sup>6</sup> The only part of a person's body that would need to be cleaned again would be their feet, as they would've become soiled on the journey between the person's house and the banquet hall.

Therefore, Jesus was saying that, just as there would be no need for a person to bathe when they've already been cleaned, the Lord did not need to give Peter a full-body cleansing because he was *already* clean. But how was this possible? When did this cleansing take place? Later, we'll learn that, as a believer and follower of Jesus, Peter has already been cleansed by the teachings of the Lord (cf. 15:3).<sup>7</sup> And so, Peter would not need Jesus to bathe him, head to toe. The Lord has been doing that ever since Peter had become his disciple. But the last thing Peter would need was for the last remnants of the world to be washed away. Though he was clean—

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<sup>5</sup> Carson (1991), p. 463, “If there were nothing more at stake than the naked act of footwashing, Jesus’ response would seem petty, unbearably rigid. It would sound like fake humility: ‘I command you to let me be humble and let me wash your feet—or you’re fired!’ But once the symbolism is seen, Jesus’ words are almost inevitable: *Unless I wash you, you have no part with me*. That is always true: unless the Lamb of God has taken away a person's sin, has washed that person, he or she can have no part with him.”

<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger (2008), p. 407.

<sup>7</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 328.

though he was already a believer—there was yet a part of him that was still contaminated by the world, and it would take quite a cleansing to make him wholly clean. And so, in this way, the foot-washing prefigured Jesus' cleansing work on the cross (cf. 1 Jhn. 1:7; Heb. 9:14, 22; Rev. 7:14). Just as he wiped the dirt from the disciple's feet, the Lord will wash away their sin. The foot-washing points to the passion.<sup>8</sup>

But this foot-washing means nothing if you are not *already* a believer, as Jesus says, “ye are clean, but not all.” John explains what he means by saying, “For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.” Ceremonial cleansing does nothing for the soul if the heart is already unclean. Judas was not a believer. His betrayal is proof that he did not believe in Jesus' word. To use Jesus' metaphor, Judas had come to the Passover dirty, unbathed, and unrepentant. He needed more than his feet cleaned; he required a full-body makeover.

**Vs. 12-14** – Though the foot-washing demonstrated what the atonement does for the believer, it had another lesson to teach. John tells us, “So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.” Considering Jesus' interactions with Peter, we know the answer to “Know ye what I have done to you?” Everyone was oblivious. And so, Jesus explains that while he is their “Master”<sup>9</sup> and “Lord,” titles he affirms (“for so I am”), Jesus has not used those positions for personal gain but to serve. And just as he, being their “Lord and Master.”<sup>10</sup> has washed their feet, they ought to wash one another's feet. Disciples of Jesus are not dictators. They are servants. They lead by serving.

**Vs. 15-16** – “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.”

The term “example” is **ὑπόδειγμα** (*hoo-pah-dayg-mah*) is not unusual. Jesus was putting himself forward as a pattern to follow. But his leadership strategy revolved around humility, self-abasement, and service. And the Lord provided no alternatives to this model. If these men would fancy themselves as Jesus' disciples, they would do what their Lord did. After all, a

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<sup>8</sup> Carson (1991), p. 463; Köstenberger (2008), p. 406; Klink (2016), p. 582, explains that this is called the “Christological interpretation” of foot-washing.

<sup>9</sup> The word is better translated as “Teacher” as the Greek term is **διδάσκαλος** (*didaskalos*), a word derived from **διδάσκω** (*didáskō*) meaning “to teach.”

<sup>10</sup> Morris (1995), p. 551, comments that “the reversed order may be significant.” Could this be a subtle way of Jesus asserting that his role as “Lord” takes priority over his role as “Teacher?”

"servant" does not hold a "greater" position than his "lord." He obeys in all things. Likewise, a messenger—i.e., "he that is sent," **ἀπόστολος** (*Apostolos*)—is not more important than the person who sent the messenger.<sup>11</sup> In this, the chain of command is unaltered. And this was something that Jesus was known to have said on multiple occasions (cf. 15:20; Mat. 10:24; Lu. 6:40).<sup>12</sup> Whether in this world or the next, some are the boss, and some are the employees. However, unlike in this world where CEOs are served by their staff, the executives serve the personnel in God's kingdom. No task was more degrading than foot-washing. Therefore, there is no task to which the disciple is exempt. It is precisely because he calls himself a follower of Jesus that he ought to do things no one else wants to do. "The 'greatest' of Jesus' disciples needs to be ready to render humble service to the 'least' of the disciples when necessary."<sup>13</sup>

**Vs. 17** – Jesus concludes his explanation of the foot-washing by saying, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The Greek term translated as "happy" is more commonly translated as "blessed" (cf. Mat. 5:3-11). Thus, vs. 17 is one of only two beatitudes in John's account (cf. 20:29).<sup>14</sup> There is happiness in knowing, but true blessedness is attained in doing. Though any other person would think tasks like foot-washing would be a demotion, the disciple knows it's a promotion. The most fulfilled life is one that is spent in service to others. Yes, there will be difficulties. But through it all, there is joy in knowing you're being like Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> This is the only time in John's account this word is used and, unlike in Lu. 6:13, it is being used in its more generic sense.

<sup>12</sup> Morris (1995), p. 552.

<sup>13</sup> Kruse (2017), p. 330.

<sup>14</sup> Morris (1995), p. 552.

## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | John | Week 41

Text: John 13:6-17

Tonight, we'll be unpacking one of only two beatitudes in John's account (cf. 13:17; 20:29). As we'll see, true blessedness is not in simply knowing but in obediently doing. And, in this context, the "doing" is foot-washing. Though any other person would think tasks like foot-washing would be a demotion, the disciple knows better. He knows it's a promotion. In fact, the most fulfilled life is spent in service to others. Yes, there will be difficulties. But through it all, there is joy in knowing you're being like Christ. After all, he whose hands formed the heavens washed the disciples' feet. What a privilege it is to do as the Lord did.

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: