

The Washing

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[0:00] Well, we're starting a new series tonight, so we closed off our series on the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation last week, and this week we start the series entitled The Farewell Speech of Christ.

So the next 17 weeks or 16 maybe, we will look at the longest extended text of Christ's speech in the Bible.

From John 13 to 17 is actually longer than the Sermon on the Mount. It's the most extended speech of Christ. One commentator calls it the Testament of Jesus Christ.

And the setting of this speech, which is broken at times, but is from the night of the Passover Meal to the same night, the Garden.

Okay, so this all takes place within one evening. This is the day before crucifixion, where 15 to 18 hours probably out from the moments Jesus will have the nails run through his hands.

[1:03] And we're looking at what is on the mind of Christ the night before. He knows he's going to be betrayed.

It's very clear in verse one. Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come, now Jesus throughout the book of John has talked about his hour coming, his hour being the crucifixion, the death, the betrayal.

He knows what's before him. He said it just in the previous chapter in 12:23. It's now the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. This is the hour that we enter into in these speeches.

But before glorification must come death. Before glorification must come death. What does the Son of God do when he knows exactly the horror he's about to undergo?

Well in our passage tonight, he undermines the socio-political, cultural, religious norms of his day.

[2:12] He reconstitutes ethics in the kingdom of God in a way that nobody could have imagined. He washes feet.

He washes feet. And this is where the farewell speeches of Christ start with the foot washing. The controlling question in this passage, if you look down in your copy of the text at verse 12, it says that when he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, do you understand what I've done to you?

So there's the question. He's washed their feet, the deed is done, and in verse 12, the controlling question in the text is, do you understand what I've done to you?

Do you understand what he's done in this passage? That's the question. What is this about? What is the washing of the feet about? And look, there's one obvious thing that it's about, and everybody saw this.

You all saw this. This says it very clearly in verses 16 and 17 that it's an example. He states it up front. There's a simple logic here.

- [3 : 21] Verse 16, truly, truly, amen, amen, literally is what he says. In other words, this is important. A servant is not greater than his master.
- What's the point? Do what the master does. He's being an example. That's the simple logic. If Jesus is a foot washer and you're a servant of Christ, then you must become a foot washer.
- You must step down from your heights and go, whoa. But if obedience, if the imitation of Christ, if becoming an obedient person to Ephesians 5 and 1, be an imitator unto God, was that simple, then we would all be like that.
- But it's not. See, one of the points here in this passage is that it isn't enough just to act like Jesus. It's not enough.
- There's more going on here with the foot washing. Christian ethics isn't simply about mimicking, in other words. So two things we're going to look at about becoming a foot washer, becoming an imitator of Jesus Christ.
- [4 : 39] If you want to become an imitator of Christ, the foot washer, you have to first be cleansed. You have to be cleansed. And then second, you have to be commissioned.
- You have to be cleansed and you have to be commissioned. So first, you need to be cleansed. Why wash feet on the last night of one's life? Why does he do this?
- I think John's answer to us about this question is in some ways given through focusing on two characters in this passage. You probably noticed in verse two during supper when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray him, dot, dot, dot.
- In other words, the first focus is on Judas. He's been given over to Satan. He has become the betrayer in his heart.
- It's going to happen. Jesus already knows it. And then in verse eight to nine, you see the focus in on a second character. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet.
- [5 : 44] And Jesus said, if I do not wash you, you have no share with me. And so Peter says, don't wash just my feet. Wash my head, wash my hands, wash my whole body. Way to go, Peter.
- Here's the kind of guy that says the dumbest stuff in class. That's the kind of picture we're being given here. But in between Judas and Peter is verses three to five.
- And in verses three to five, we have the upending of the socio-cultural political order. What does Jesus do between Judas and Peter?
- Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God, that he was going back to God, he rose from supper, he laid aside his garments and taking a towel, he tied it around his waist and he began to wash the disciples' feet.
- Now the first thing we see here is that Jesus takes off his Passover, his outer garment. This is like taking off your dinner jacket.
- [6 : 50] It's like taking off your, it's like wearing, it's like not wearing a tuxedo. It's like a tuxedo to a black tie event. Some of you will be giving what I'm talking about.
- Not just kidding. Look, he's taking off his outer garment. He's putting on, this is like wearing an undershirt. This is the clothing of the poor.
- This is the clothing of the servant. This is the clothing of the slave. Now how do we know that? Look, no peer in this Jewish first century context would have ever washed someone's feet.
- Washing feet was a very normal activity in the first century in the ancient Near East. It happened on the time you would travel in sandals, you would get extremely dirty feet, not only dirty but cut, bruised, broken, diseased.

And it would be very common for you to go to an important mill like the Passover or enter into somebody's house and have your feet washed, but no Jew, whatever, washed feet.

[7:59] The rabbis in fact in the first century taught that it was below the level of a Jew to wash another person's feet. Only the Gentile slaves, in fact, could do it.

There's a rabbinic commentary on Exodus that's kind of the most liberal, the most generous of who's allowed to wash feet, and this is what it says. The washing of one's feet is reserved for the Gentile slave or for Jewish women and children.

Jesus is undermining the socio-political culture here. Now we can see something of Peter's reaction. No, you will not wash my feet.

Masters do not wash feet. Rabbis do not wash feet. Not even the Jewish common man, not even the Jewish beggar would wash another Jew's feet.

So we see something of what's happening here, of why Peter's saying this. And so in verse 7 and 10, Jesus gives two answers. Verse 7, what I am doing, you don't understand.

[9:13] You don't understand it now, but you will. You don't get this. You don't get what this foot washing is about. In other words, Peter thinks the foot washing is about foot washing.

But what Jesus is saying is it's not about foot washing. This activity that I'm doing right now, you don't understand it, but you will. You will, he's referring to something in the future there.

And then in verse 10, he instantiates it even more by saying this. Jesus said to him, the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean.

The one who's bathed doesn't need to wash. It's not about the foot washing. The foot washing is not about the foot washing. So what's going on here? What's going on here in his response to Peter and his undermining of the social norm?

Well, if you jump back up to verse 13, we see it. Oh, sorry. Verse 1, 13, 1. Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had to come to depart out of this world to the Father, having, and this is one of my favorite verses in all scripture, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

[10:32] Having loved his own past tense, he loved them to the end. Now, the word for end there is the, you know this word. It's the Greek word telos.

You've probably heard the word telos, our telos, our goal, our purpose, our end, our final purpose, that thing to which we're moving towards. That's the word that's being given there.

What it's saying then is this, it's pointing to his final hour. The telos of his very existence, the crucifixion. He knows his hour is coming.

The telos is his death. It's coming. And when he tells Peter that there's something else going on here, the foot washing is not about the foot washing. You don't understand what's happening, but you will.

He's talking about his telos. Five days ago from this passage, just five days before this. Jesus had just entered into Jerusalem after healing.

[11:35] Sorry, Jesus had just healed Lazarus, raised Lazarus from the dead and he was at Mary and Martha's house. And this is literally one chapter before chapter 13.

And there's another foot washing. Do you remember? Mary gets out the perfume and the oil. It was worth something like 300 quid today.

And she pours it all over Jesus' feet and anoints him. Now what's John teaching us in that text? Jesus makes it really clear. This was the point.

The anointment of Jesus' feet in John chapter 12 is the great anticipation of the fact that Jesus is the sacrificial lamb.

Why? Because in the past every week, when you were going to take your lamb to the altar to be sacrificed, you would anoint it with oil. And in John 12, Jesus himself, the pascal lamb, the sacrificial lamb, he's being anointed with oil.

[12:33] His feet are being perfumed, preparing him for the altar, for the cross. And the same exact thing is happening in our text in 13.

John wants you to see in chapter 12, the pascal lamb, the lamb anointed, the lamb that's going to be sacrificed. And in our passage in chapter 13, what does he want you to see?

He wants you to see Jesus the king. He wants you to see Jesus the king. How? Look at this. Verse 3, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

Now, another way to say that, what it literally says, is that Jesus, knowing that God had given him all power, knowing that God had given him all power, he knew his hour was coming, he had all power, he knew it was coming from glorification.

He had been given all power. This is what one commentator says, with such power and status at his disposal, we might have expected him to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath.

[13:52] Instead, the king, the king of all power, takes off his robe and washes the disciples' feet. You see?

The king of power becomes the foot washer. In chapter 12, we're given the picture of the paschal lamb prepared for sacrifice. In chapter 13, the king of all the universe, the king who would be glorified, who was given all power from his father, becomes the foot washer.

Look, this is the great anticipation of the cross. The activity of kneeling and doing something not even a Gentile slave wanted to do.

What else is this but a picture of the crucifixion? Look, does the crucifixion look like kingship? Does the crucifixion look like the man who has been given power over all rulers and authorities in the heavenly places?

No. This act of foot washing is telling the disciples, you don't understand what's coming. But you will.

[15:00] Look, you can only be a slave to Christ, a foot washing person, an imitator of Jesus, because he became a slave to you.

You can't be a foot washer. You can't be a slave to God if you haven't been washed by the God who became a slave.

The act of foot washing is Jesus' anticipation of the cross. It's the great picture that the king of the universe is becoming for us the slave of sin. He's becoming the darkness.

That's what it looks like to go down and wash people's feet. And so he says to Peter, you need to be clean. You need your whole body washed. Look, the foot washing is pointing away from itself.

The question's really simple. Are you washed? You can't be an imitator of Christ. The foot washing isn't merely about saying go and do likewise.

[16:06] The first point is that you've got to be clean. You've got to be clean. You can't become this person unless you've been cleansed. Are you clean? Are you forgiven?

Look, you know this. It's not merely enough to act like Jesus. And the greatest example of this is the existence of Judas in this passage.

Look, sometimes you guys get to hear great preaching at St. Columbus by accident from Derek or from Tom or whoever.

Judas heard the greatest preaching. Judas heard the greatest preaching. Judas did some great deeds of service.

They're recounted all over the Gospels. He was one of the 12. He engaged in ministry. Look, St. Columbus Discipleship Program will never be the Discipleship Program Judas got to go underneath.

[17:06] He walked with Jesus. He talked with Jesus. He sat at Jesus' feet. He did what Jesus did. He mimicked him. In the passage before this in John 12, you remember that when Mary anoints Jesus' feet, Judas says, shouldn't we have sold that money, sold that perfume and taken the money and given it to the poor?

He was about deeds of service. He did these things. He did these things. But look, just mimicking Christ isn't enough.

You have to be cleansed. That's the point. That's the point of juxtaposing Peter and Judas here. Here's what Judas doesn't get. He doesn't get the absurdity, the recklessness, the lavishness of Christ's love.

There's a recklessness to pouring out 300 quid of perfume on somebody's feet. There's an absurdity about it. There's a recklessness and an absurdity about the king of the universe taking off his outer garment, becoming a slave, kneeling and washing your dirty, stinky, bruised and broken feet.

There's an absurdity about that. There's a ridiculousness, you see, about the fact that God said, if you eat of the tree, you shall surely die.

[18:29] And then in the very curse promises the ultimate blessing. There's a reckless, spin-thrift nature about God.

He lavishes things on people who don't deserve it. And this is exactly what Judas doesn't get. He doesn't understand that kind of love. He doesn't see it.

He doesn't see the fact that Jesus became the prodigal. He became the outcast on the cross precisely because he came to rescue the prodigal. He came to rescue the outcast.

Is there anything more lavish, more radical, more prodigal than the fact that Jesus washed twelve pairs of feet in this passage?

Twelve pairs. Not eleven. He gets on his knees and washes the feet of the betrayer. All twelve.

[19:29] That self-forgiveness. Yes, right? You would say yes. So look, he doesn't just wash the feet of one betrayer.

It focuses just as much on Peter. Just moments after this. One day Peter is going to betray Jesus three times.

He doesn't just wash the feet of one betrayer. And that's the point of focusing on Judas and Peter. The foot washing is the king of the universe washing the feet of twelve betrayers.

The cross is the baptism, the washing, the pouring of blood, not over people who are clean, but over betrayers. That's us, you see. The point is that we see ourselves with Judas and Peter in this passage.

Peter is just as much of an embarrassment, but he was clean. That's the difference. Not anything he did, but something that was being done for him.

[20:39] Are you clean? Are you washed? Look, do you love him? Do you love him? Do you see the reckless love of Jesus and have a reckless desire to pour 300 quid a perfume over his feet?

That's what John's trying to get us to see here. Everybody loves the classic king and like pauper story, right?

We even had one of these in reality television in the States. We were here as well as terrible, but this millionaire would go and do a bachelor type thing where he would date all these different girls and they would have no idea that he was a millionaire and he would tell them like he was an unbelievable amount of debt.

There was no future financially ahead and see who really loved him. Everybody loves these kind of stories because that really poor reality TV example is based off of a more classic fairy tale, right?

The king and the pauper fairy tale. The king goes out, you know, arrays himself and the clothing of the poor eats with the lowly and he's looking for that girl, right?

[21 : 59] He's looking for that queen. He's looking for the woman out in his kingdom that doesn't know he's the king. He's looking for the woman that he finds that's got so much humility that she's absolutely beautiful.

And you know what happens, right? He goes and finds her. He finds Aladdin. He finds like, you know, it's the opposite of like Jasmine and Aladdin. I mean, it's, he goes out and he finds her and he brings her back and he marries her.

And instantly the woman who had no idea who this man was, the woman who was absolutely poor becomes the queen of the kingdom. She becomes the rich one. She sits on the throne with him, right?

So Jesus, the king of the universe came and de-clothed himself, Philippians too. He did not count equality with God, something to be grasped, but he made himself nothing taking on the form of a doulas, a slave.

But the difference in that, the true story of Christ and the king and the pauper story is that Jesus Christ did not go out amongst the poor looking for the most humble.

[23 : 14] He came to the betrayer. You see? He came looking for a bride that had prostituted herself. That's who he came for. He came for us.

He comes and washes the feet of the prostitute on the cross. This is the gospel. You see? What do you do with this?

Many of you already believe this gospel. You're one of the clenched here. What do you do with this? Ignatius of Loyola and his 51 meditations on how to live the spiritual life.

In the first week, it's a two-week process and more, but in the first week he says, spend the entire week repenting of your sins and in the second week spend the entire week meditating on the great works of Christ.

The Christian who's already cleansed doesn't become an imitator of God, a foot washer, without constantly meditating on their cleansing.

[24 : 21] The gospel has to come fresh to us every day. The King has to come fresh to the bride that has left him.

That's us. Secondly, to become an imitator of Christ, then, you not only need to be cleansed first and foremost, but to be a foot washer, you must be commissioned.

You must be commissioned. Foot washing points outside of itself to the end of Christ's life, what he's doing there.

We've just seen that. It also gives a new telos, a new goal, a new purpose to the disciples. Cleansing of sins comes first and the commission comes second, but both must be there.

Both must come. This is an ordination service. It's not just pointing us to the cross, but it's also pointing us to our ordination, our commissioning.

[25 : 23] We see that in a number of ways. You can see it first in the fact that Jesus anoints his disciples to be the bearers of the cross, to take up their cross.

He tells them, you will do greater works than even these. Why? He told them this. Why? Because his hour to leave the world had come.

If you look back up in verse 13, chapter 13, verse 1, now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

And after the devil had put it into the heart of Peter, oh, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray him, Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.

Look, the hour that had come wasn't just about the crucifixion, but it was about the glorification. It was about the ascension. It was about the fact that Jesus was going to the Father.

[26 : 23] And look, this is a commissioning because Jesus is leaving his people. He's washing their feet in order to send them out in the same way that his feet had been anointed for his task in the previous chapter.

Mary had anointed Jesus' feet. She had bathed his feet in perfume to prepare him for the cross. And now Jesus is anointing the feet of the disciples.

He's preparing them for their mission. He's preparing them for their commission. He's preparing to send them out. You see down in verse 12, when he says, do you understand what I've done to you?

You call me teacher and Lord and you are right for so I am. If I am your Lord and teacher, I have washed your feet. You also to wash one another's feet. But when he's talking to them, he says that he gives them two ways to see it.

There's a master and a servant. But then he says that the servant is the one who has been sent, the one who has been sent. The word there for being sent is the word, and you know this word, apostolos, apostle, the sent one, the called one.

[27 : 37] He's saying to them that the foot washing is ascending forth. It's a master sending his people out to do the work that they're left to do. It's taking a share in him.

Look, people called on commission have been called by Jesus, cleansed to be heirs of the world. The apostle Paul tells us.

If you're cleansed tonight, you've been called to be a brother, a sister, a friend of Christ, to be an heir of Jesus Christ, to partake with him.

He literally says in his passage, you will share with me. You've been given a portion of the kingdom. In your union with Christ, you have been seated in the heavenlies alongside him.

Here's the calling of the commissioned one, the one who sits high on the throne next to Jesus Christ, the brother, the sister, the friend, is to go low.

[28 : 38] You sit next to the king if you are cleansed, but the ethic that he took upon himself becomes your ethic. Philippians 2 becomes your hymn.

You divest yourself of your outer garment and become a doulas, a slave, the form of a servant. The highest co-inheritors of the kingdom of God, of the whole world, are commissioned to take the form of the lowest.

If you want to be kingly like Jesus, you do so by becoming a slave. That's the point of the commission. Now, what is this today?

What does this look like in 2016? What does this look like for us? It's not literally washing feet. I don't know if you guys have ever been around this, but I've been in a couple of settings in the past where people have done this and worship, and that's all good and well as far as it goes.

But the point is not to wash feet, literally. That's not what Jesus is getting at here. What does this look like? This action of Christ is the benediction of the greatest commandment.

[29:53] Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the benediction. This is the blessing. This is the close of the service, you see. This is an ordination service where Jesus is closing the service, washing the feet, and with the benediction, he's saying to them, love your neighbor as yourself.

He's showing them that through the act of foot washing. It's an objective act, an act outside of us pointing to the necessity of a subjective condition.

You have to be, being cleansed means to go get dirty, you see. Your feet are washed so that you can step back out into the muck, back out into the mud to the lowest of society.

Today's ethical norms, you guys know this, but today's ethical norms, I mean if we were to kind of whittle down where the society thinks of the good life, it's definitely in the ethic of individuality, and part of that comes with the ethic of tolerance.

It's this, it's the right to be an individual and to be an absolute individual. To be alone and to be left alone.

[31:08] To not have to deal with people and to not have to forgive. This is the ethic of tolerance. It's that as long as you keep to yourself, that's good enough.

That's the good life. This comes in the foot washing, subverting all socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious norms.

The question becomes, what does it look like to subvert the cultural ethic? What does it look like to come underneath it and to shock it with something that's unimaginable?

Quite simply, I just want to point you, not to something super extreme, but back to the ordinary, back to the ordinary, and that's this.

We can subvert the cultural norm, the ethic, the rampant individualism by donning on ourself the fruits of the spirit.

[32:03] There is nothing that looks stranger than self-forgetfulness in a culture of individualism. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, and self-control.

There's nothing that looks stranger than self-forgetfulness in a culture of individualism. One commentator says this, the point of Christ's mandate to be an example in this context is in any case painfully clear.

No emissary has the right to think he is exempt from tasks cheerfully undertaken by the one who has sent him. And no slave has the right to judge any menial task beneath him after his master has already performed it.

Working out what this looks like in specific ways is going to be something that's situated within your own life context. But one thing I want to leave you with before we close is this.

The early church had a grip on this. The early church had a grip on this. I've read this passage from this early letter before, but of course nobody remembers, so it's fine.

[33:15] Methetes, the disciple, wrote a letter in the late second century to an unbeliever named Dionysus. And it's kind of a long quote, but I just want you to hear in it how the early church is taking the ethic of becoming the foot washer into their own socio-political setting.

And this is what Methetes writes to Dionysus. He's writing to him and saying, I want to write to you to tell you why this new practice of piety that you've noticed in the culture has now entered into our world.

What's going on, Dionysus, is wondering, why does the culture look so different than it used to? And this is what Methetes says. It's because of the Christians.

The Christians are distinguished from other men, neither by country nor language, nor the customs which they observe. They don't inhabit cities of their own. They don't employ a peculiar form of speech.

They don't lead a life which is marked out by any type of strange singularity. But they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.

[34 : 24] They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with everyone else, and yet endure all things as if foreigners.

Every foreign land is to them as their native country. And every land of their birth is a land of strangers. And look, this is subversion and an socio-political context that was shockingly strange to us.

They marry, as do all others. They beget children, but they do not kill their children. They have a common table, but they don't have a common bed.

They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, but at the same time they surpass the laws in their lives.

They are the best citizens. They love all men. But at the same time, they're persecuted by all. They're unknown and condemned. They are put to death. They're restored to life.

[35 : 30] They're poor, but they make people rich. They are in lack of things, but they abound. They are dishonored, yet they in their dishonor are glorified.

They are evil. The evil is often spoken of them, yet, and they are reviled, yet they are blessed. They are insulted, and they were played the insult with honor and forgiveness.

They are sailed by the Jews as foreigners, and they are persecuted by the Greeks, but those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

Taking up one's cross and humble, self-sacrificing, self-forgiveness, the ethic of the foot washer. Look, Jesus closes this passage in verse 17 by simply telling you this.

This will make you happy. That's all. This will make you happy. Blessed are those who do these things.

[36 : 35] Blessed are those who do these things. Ultimate happiness is wrapped up in that word. Blessed are those who are cleansed and take on the commission of foot washing.

May God make us all self-forgetful foot washers. Let's pray. Our Lord and God, we ask that you would cleanse us of our sins now and help us to become foot washing, going low, self-sacrificing, self-forgetful people.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.