

Main Idea: In John 13:1-17 we see in living color a love like no other. There are four scenes in the story, which show us four things about love. We looked at the first three in the last two weeks, and will consider the fourth today.

- I. We see love’s context (1-2).
- II. We see love’s communication (3-5).
- III. We see love’s challenge (6-11).
 - A. Peter exhibited a wrong view of himself (6-7).
 - B. Peter exhibited a wrong view of Christ (8).
 - C. Peter exhibited a wrong view of cleansing (9-11).
- IV. We see love’s commission (12-17).
 - A. Jesus clarified roles (12-13).
 1. He is the Teacher and Lord.
 2. We are His disciples and slaves.
 - B. Jesus clarified our responsibility (14-15).
 1. We are to wash one another’s feet.
 2. We are to follow His example.
 - C. Jesus clarified the rationale (16-17).
 1. It’s fitting in light of who we are (16).
 2. It’s the key to the blessed life (17).

Make It Personal: Let’s ask ourselves some questions...

1. What do I think of Jesus?
2. What do I think of myself?
3. How do I respond when I see dirty feet?
4. Whose feet should I wash this week?

This morning we return to one of the most life-shaping texts in the Bible. We’re at the beginning of what Bible scholars call *The Upper Room Discourse*, which runs from John 13-16.

Jesus the Christ is just about ready to finish His earthly mission and return to heaven. He’s now meeting with the men He’s chosen to take His work to the next level once He leaves. He won’t let them out of His sight, basically, until He’s arrested, tried, and nailed to a cross. He’s spending His final hours with them in an upper room. It’s there He gives them a powerful object lesson to summarize what He expects of them once He’s gone.

If you were a leader and were going to set up a strategy to transform the world, I’m confident it wouldn’t involve this demonstration. Jesus got down on His knees, washed His followers’ feet, and then said to them, “Go and do likewise.”

That’s the strategy? That’s the mentality that Jesus wants His followers to have? You’ll get walked all over if you assume that position, won’t you? This is a dog-eat-dog, tough-love world.

The Winter Olympics, as you know, kicked off in Russia this week. I listened to an interesting interview conducted by NBC host, Bob Costas, who asked a Russian specialist what the Russian people thought of Russian president, Vladimir Putin. He made it clear that Putin is an autocrat and that the majority of Russians are supportive of him, that they want a strong leader who will restore Russian pride and prosperity. Which of course is what Putin has done.

It’s the way the world operates. You get things done through a show of power. That’s what a good leader does, and what he teaches his followers to do.

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Which is what makes what Jesus did in the upper room so staggering. He, the King of kings, got down on His sovereign knees, and with His own two hands washed His followers' dirty feet, and said, "That's what I want you to do with each other."

There are four scenes in the story, presented in John 13:1-17, which show us four things about true love. We looked at the first three in the past two weeks, and we'll consider the fourth today.

I. We see love's context (1-2).

According to verse 1, it was Passover. In that upper room, Jesus is going to eat the Passover meal with the twelve. In about twelve hours, He Himself will be slaughtered as the final Passover Lamb, as John said, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)."

This is Jesus' mission. It's why He, the Son of God, came into the world, and why He is now, as verse 1 says, returning *to the Father*, mission accomplished. He has loved the people His Father has given to Him, and now He's about to show them the *full extent of His love*.

II. We see love's communication (3-5).

If love is real, it makes it known, with words, yes, but most of all, with deeds. Love always does what is in the best interest of the other person. And that's what Jesus did in that upper room.

He looked around the room and saw His followers reclining around the table. There was a problem. Their feet were filthy dirty and this wasn't their house. The water basin was by the door, but His men were arguing amongst themselves as to which of them was the most important (Luke 22:24).

Jesus got up, removed His outer clothing, and assumed the posture of a slave. He took the water basin, and one by one, took the feet of these men in His hands, washed them, and then dried them.

Why would He do that? Because that's what God does, which is what love does, because God is love (1 John 4:8). When there's a context of need, it communicates and does something about that need.

III. We see love's challenge (6-11).

The challenge came from Peter, and it was rooted in three fundamental areas of wrong thinking.

A. Peter exhibited a wrong view of himself (6-7). In verse 6, Peter said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" I don't know if he was saying, "I don't need this," or, "I'm not worthy of this," or what, but Peter wasn't thinking rightly, at least in part, about *himself*.

In verse 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Notice that. *You do not realize now*. That's what Jesus told Peter.

Peter had a need, but he challenged Jesus' attempt to meet that need because he wasn't thinking rightly, first, about himself. He's just like so many today who resist the love of Christ because they're not seeing themselves as He sees them.

B. Peter exhibited a wrong view of Christ (8). In verse 8 Peter said, "No, you shall never wash my feet." That's never a good idea, to flat out contradict the Lord of the

universe. Again, Peter wasn't thinking rightly or he never would have said this. If the Creator in human flesh says you need something, and you say you *don't*, you're not thinking rightly. Who knows better what you need, the All-knowing Creator of heaven and earth, or you, a tiny little creature?

Of course, Peter was resisting Jesus because He thought this action was too demeaning for Him. Again, he was thinking wrongly, for this is why He left heaven in the first place. This is what love does, starting with divine love. It denies itself, it demotes itself, it humbly gives and meets needs. That's dirty feet tonight, and dirty souls tomorrow on the cross.

C. Peter exhibited a wrong view of cleansing (9-11). In verse 8 Jesus patiently responded, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." To which Peter replied in verse 9, "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

But again, Peter's not thinking rightly, this time about cleansing, as Jesus explained in verses 10. "Jesus answered, 'A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.'"

There's a sinner's greatest need. He needs a bath, says Jesus. He needs to have his sins washed away. How does that happen? By doing something? No, but by believing in Jesus and what He came to do. He came to live a perfect life as a substitute for sinners, and then died in the place of sinners, taking their sin upon Himself and enduring the just wrath of God that sin deserves, and then He overcame the consequences of sin and death by rising from the dead, again as a substitute. If you believe *that*, if you believe in *Him*, you become clean.

You've experienced that, Peter. You've had the bath. You've believed in Me. You are clean. However, your feet still get dirty, and you need Me to take care of that cleansing too. Which I gladly do, because I love you.

My friend, every person's greatest need is for a spiritual bath, to be saved, to be washed, to be cleansed by the atoning work of Jesus. Have you experienced it? Have you put your faith in Christ alone?

You say, "I have, but I'm still struggling with sin. What do I need?" Keep coming to Jesus, not to be saved again. Just one bath is all you need. But for cleansing every day, to get rid of the world's contamination that's clinging to your feet.

Friends, why do people challenge Jesus and resist His love? It boils down to this. They're not thinking rightly about themselves, about Him, and about the cleansing He alone can provide.

We saw a vivid illustration of this last Tuesday in a debate between Ken Ham and "Bill Nye the Science Guy." Did you see it? It ended up being not so much about science, though both men talked a lot about science, but a world-view clash. I thought Al Mohler, who was at the debate, wrote up an astute summary:

Both men were asked if any evidence could ever force them to change their basic understanding. Ham said no, pointing to the authority of Scripture. Nye said that evidence for creation would change his mind. But Nye made clear that he was unconditionally committed to a naturalistic worldview, which would make such evidence impossible. Neither man is actually willing to allow for any dispositive evidence to change his mind. Both operate in basically closed intellectual systems. The main problem is that *Ken Ham knows this to be the case, but Bill Nye apparently does not* [emphasis added]. Ham was consistently bold in citing his confidence in

God, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in the full authority and divine inspiration of the Bible. He never pulled a punch or hid behind an argument. Nye seems to believe that he is genuinely open to any and all new information, but it is clear that his ultimate intellectual authority is the prevailing scientific consensus. More than once he asserted a virtually unblemished confidence in the ability of modern science to correct itself. *He steadfastly refused to admit that any intellectual presuppositions color his own judgment...*

The central issue last night was really not the age of the earth or the claims of modern science. The question was not really about the ark or sediment layers or fossils. It was about *the central worldview clash* of our times, and of any time: the clash between the worldview of the self-declared “reasonable man” and the worldview of the sinner saved by grace.¹

Well said. Bill Nye heard Ken Ham talk about God’s offer of salvation through His Son’s atoning work, but showed no interest in it, indeed challenged it as folly, again and again. Why? For the same reasons Peter did, a wrong view of Himself, of Christ, and of cleansing.

But the story isn’t over. We now come to the fourth scene. Love’s context, love’s communication, love’s challenge, leads to...

IV. We see love’s commission (12-17).

In verses 12-17 Jesus is going to commission His followers to do something in light of what He just did for them. He just taught them by action, now He’s going to teach them with words. In fact, He’s going to clarify for His followers, then and now, three subjects.

A. Jesus clarified roles (12-13). Notice verses 12-13, “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.’”

Don’t miss the words *his place*. Jesus, by both action and explicit words, lets us know He has a place, *His place*. Where is that place? In this scene, it’s at the head of the table. In another 40 plus days, it will be on the throne of heaven. Yes, He took the place of a slave for a season, but that’s not His place.

Why not? Who is He?

1. *He is the Teacher and Lord.* That’s what you call Me, He says, and that is what I am. I think it’s significant that Jesus reverses the order. In verse 13, “You call me Teacher and Lord.” In verse 14 He says, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher.” He emphasizes His Lordship. You see Me as the Teacher who is also your Lord. But I am your Lord, which is why I teach you.

So what does that make us? Who are we? Don’t miss this.

2. *We are His disciples and slaves.* Disciples. A disciple is a person who follows and learns from another, and then lives for that person. Slaves. That’s the word Jesus uses in verse 16. The NIV says “servant.” The Greek text says *doulos*, slave.

Brothers and sisters, we are Jesus’ slaves. Yes, because of His amazing love and grace, we are so much more than that—children, saints, members of His household—but

¹ <http://www.albertmohler.com/2014/02/05/bill-nyes-reasonable-man-the-central-worldview-clash-of-the-ham-nye-debate/>

nothing less. We are His slaves. And what a privilege to be so, to belong to such a Master who died for us and now provides for our every need!

In this commission, first Jesus clarified our roles. He is the Lord and Teacher, and we are His disciples and slaves.

B. Jesus clarified our responsibility (14-15). That's verses 14-15, "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

What's our responsibility? He says it in two ways.

1. *We are to wash one another's feet.* That's verse 14. "Now that I have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet."

2. *We are to follow His example.* That's verse 15. And, of course, that's what He just did, washed feet. So that's what we're to do.

Don't glamorize this. Think for a moment of the feet Jesus just washed. Two of those dirt-crust-ed feet belong to a man who keeps telling Him he loves Him and will do anything for Him. For that matter, another ten of those men basically say the same thing. But in just a couple of hours this man is going to curse His name in self-protecting denial, and the others are going to abandon Him in shame.

Ever had anybody do that to you, say they love you, make promises to you, and then break their promises and your heart?

Of course, worst of all, two of these feet belong to the man who's going to betray Jesus for a handful of coins. Ever been betrayed by a close friend?

So these are the feet of the men that Jesus washed. And He says to these men, and us... *Do that with each other.*

Brothers and sisters, our Savior says this is to be our identifying mark. How should we treat the people who hurt us, abandon us, and betray us? Listen to Jesus. He commissions us to wash their feet, just like He did with ours.

Some take these words to indicate that foot-washing should be an ordinance of the church, a ceremony along with baptism and the Lord's Supper. I don't think so. D. A. Carson observes, "Wise theologians and expositors have always been reluctant to raise to the level of universal rite something that appears only once in Scripture."² And John MacArthur rightly points out, "Jesus said... 'you also should do *as* I did to you,' not, 'what I did to you.'"³

Let me remind you of something. As Leon Morris points out, "Nothing was more menial than the washing of the feet."⁴ It's so...self-denying, so humbling. And that being the case, think of the implications. If you can wash someone's feet, then you can do all kinds of other hard things for their benefit, too, right?

And that's the Master's point.

As Leon Morris puts it, "True greatness is seen in lowly service."⁵ What's true of the person who is washing another's feet? When you're washing another's feet, your focus is not on yourself, but on the Lord (if your motive is right) and on the other person.

And think about what happens when you wash someone else's feet. You make contact with the person, personal, physical, meaningful *contact*. And that contact causes

² Carson, *John*, p. 468.

³ John MacArthur, p. 68.

⁴ Leon Morris, p. 621.

⁵ Leon Morris, p. 620.

something to happen to your relationship with that person. It gets closer, and therefore can go deeper because of the contact.

Contrast that to the various ways we make contact with one another today in the Body of Christ. Texting, Facebook messaging, emailing, perhaps phone calls. These are very helpful modes of sharing information with each other, and they make us feel like we're connected. But think about it. In each, there's contact without *contact*.

No physical contact. Which means these modes create an artificial sense that we're in touch with each other, but we haven't really *touched* each other.

"You should wash one another's feet." That's what our Savior told His followers. I know this means so much more than just making physical contact, but we must not make it mean less. Jesus calls His followers to touch each other, to get involved in each other's lives, not just with words, but with action, physical, get your hands dirty if necessary action.

Notice something else. He specifically says that we're to touch and wash the feet of *one another*. Kent Hughes remarks that it's easier sometimes to humble ourselves and wash the feet of those we do *not* know. Strangers. Outsiders. But a church member who's offended us? That's a different story. When we know the feet, where they've been, who they've stepped on (perhaps our toes), that can make it tougher.

But Jesus says those are the feet I want you to wash, *one another's feet*. I don't think He's prohibiting us from doing this to outsiders, but it needs to start at home in the family of God.

"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," says Jesus at the end of this chapter (13:35). "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers," said Paul in Galatians 6:10.

I think there's a practical side to this too. There are so many dirty feet in the world! Are we responsible for all of them? That could overwhelm us, as Christ's followers, especially when we consider our primary mission is to proclaim the good news of Christ. So where do we start? Jesus told us. Start here. Wash *one another's feet*.

Serve each other. Care for each other. Love each other. The world will see that and know that you belong to Me. And when they do, you will have opportunity to tell them about Me and what I did on that cross and in that tomb, so that slaves to self could become servants of God and others.

But there's one more matter pertaining to love's commission, and Jesus clarifies it next. First, our role, then our responsibility, and thirdly...

C. Jesus clarified the rationale (16-17). He says in verses 16-17, "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

Why should we wash feet? For two reasons.

1. *It's fitting in light of who we are (16).* In verse 16 Jesus reminds His men of something He's told them before. For instance, back in Matthew 10:24 He says, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." Also in Luke 6:40, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Later in the Upper Room He will say in John 15:20, "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

Now He says, “No servant is greater than His Master.” And, “No messenger is greater than the One who sent him.” That’s who we are. Servants, actually *slaves* (doulos). And *messengers*.

So why wash feet? Here’s the first reason. It’s just fitting in light of who we are. We belong to One who Himself washed feet, and we are His messengers, and He wants us, indeed, commands us to do with others what He did with us.

But it’s not just about grim duty. No, no. According to Jesus...

2. *It’s the key to the blessed life (17)*. Hear Him again, “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” Let that word grip your soul. *Blessed*. Do you want God’s blessing? Do you want to experience a truly *blessed* life? Here’s the key, according to Jesus, and it’s counter-intuitive.

The blessed life comes when you think about yourself and go for the gusto, right? Wrong, says Jesus. The blessed life comes to the person who, first, if I can say this way, comes to Jesus for his own cleansing, and then goes looking for others who need cleaned up, and helps them get cleaned up. Do that, says Jesus, and you will be blessed.

Indeed, blessed beyond measure. I can attest to this. When my focus is on myself, I feel stale and empty. But when I partner with my Savior in meeting the needs of others, that’s when joy fills my soul. Can you relate?

By the way, Jesus here underscores the huge difference between merely knowing and doing. The disciples now knew something (“Now that you *know* these things,” said Jesus). But the question now is whether they will act on that knowledge (“you will be blessed if you *do* them”). Back in Luke 8:21 Jesus said, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and *put it into practice*.” Later in His great commission Jesus said, “And teach them *to obey* everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28:20).”

Do you want to be blessed? Then do what Jesus just said.

Make It Personal: Let’s ask ourselves some questions...four bottom-line questions.

1. *What do I think of Jesus?* “You call me Teacher and Lord,” said Jesus to these men. That was their assessment of Him. What’s yours? Start with these two titles.

Is He your *Teacher*? Are you a student of His words? Do you spend time each day before an open Bible, and make it a priority each week to be under the teaching of His Word?

Next, is He your *Lord*? Not just an attachment to your life, but the director of it, the Master, the chief, the boss, the owner.

But here’s where the terms fail us, for when we think of master, and chief, and boss, and owner, we think of men who have power and abuse that power. Not so Jesus. This Master became a slave because He loves us, and He gave His life on a cross to rescue us, to clean us up inside and out. And if we put our faith in Him, He gives us new life, eternal life, abundant life.

2. *What do I think of myself?* Start here. Do I see myself as a dirty sinner who needs cleansing to be right with God? And if I’ve called on Jesus to cleanse me, do I now see myself as He declares me to be, *bathed* and *clean* in God’s sight?

Is that how I see myself? If He has made my heart and soul and hands clean, do I see the purpose of this cleansing as He sees it? And what’s that? He wants to use me to reach out to others who need cleaned up.

Perhaps it goes without saying, but let me say it. If we're going to wash dirty feet, we're going to get our hands dirty. Foot-washing is dirty work. To do so requires the view of oneself that Jesus calls for in John 13.

Brothers and sisters, let me say it again. We are *slaves*. Granted, we are children of God, saints, the Body of Christ, and many other images used in the New Testament. But we are *slaves*. We do not have independent rights. We belong to a Master who calls on us to do as He did and wash feet.

Is this how you see yourself?

3. *How do I respond when I see dirty feet?* You say, "What do you mean by dirty feet?" Things that shouldn't be there. That's what dirt is on feet, something that shouldn't be there, something that needs to be removed, cleaned up. Needs.

What do you do when you see a brother with things in his life that shouldn't be there? How do you respond? We could look down our noses, or look the other way, or hope somebody else does something about that nasty dirt, but Jesus says, *I want you to wash those dirty feet.*

I think that dirty feet, in particular, represents areas of needed sanctification in our brothers and sisters lives. So a brother misses church for three Sundays in a row. What's that mean? It means some spiritual feet are getting dirty out in the world, just like ours do when we avoid the cleansing ministry of the Word.

You see a weak-souled teen laughing at dirty jokes at school and losing his testimony. You hear a sister in Christ gossiping in the break room. You notice a dad or mom who's starting to sacrifice their kids on the altar of their career. Those are dirty feet, and the question is, how do I respond when I see them?

But I don't think Jesus wants us to limit dirty feet to sin issues. Dirty feet represents potentially *any* need in the life of a fellow-follower of Jesus. You see a frustrated single mom trying to raise her kids without a godly man in their lives, and you are a godly man. You drive passed a widow's house and notice a driveway covered in snow, and you have shovel in your garage. You learn that someone in your Sunday School class has a broken furnace, and you have a spare room.

When you see those situations, according to Jesus, what are you seeing? Opportunities to be a blessing, yes, and to receive one. "Now that you know these things, you will be *blessed if you do them.*"

So the question again, is, how do I respond when I see dirty feet? Let's finish with one more question, a very specific and intentional one.

4. *Whose feet should I wash this week?* Let's bow before the Lord and ask Him.