

Understanding Humility ▪ John 13:2-25

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Intro: There have been quite a few humbling experiences in my marriage, especially during the early years. One of them was the first week of taking Greek at CIU.

I came home excited, zealous with the possibility of reading the Bible in the original language. I had my greek grammar book with one assignment: Memorize the alphabet by the end of the week.

My wife Emily said, “Hey, let me look at it and try it.” I think she had it down in about 15 or 20 mins....and it took me the entire week...and two decades later I still get Greek letters flipped around in the alphabet.

- › The Lesson: some of us are just slower learners. For some, it just takes longer to understand.

The disciples gathered around Jesus were also those who were slower learners....at least in the spiritual side of things.

In this narrative, twice Jesus alludes to the disciples understanding. (v7, 12)

The Farewell Discourse is full of surprises.

—The first surprise is Jesus taking the role of a servant and washing the disciple’s dirty feet.

—That’s followed by his announcement that one will betray him.

—Another surprise for the disciples is trying to wrap their minds around why it’s better for Jesus to leave, than to stay.

All these things are not easily understood.

- V2 is very important in the developing plot —the first character we see is the Devil.

We find an unwelcome guest is in the upper room.

- The curtain is pulled back for us to see that what’s going is a cosmic battle.

- It helps us to see that the betrayal which leads to Jesus's cross is not something that Judas concocted up alone—there was a satanic influence behind him (though Judas is still fully responsible).
- This passage revolves around one central act: The foot washing of the disciples.

Behind the foot washing is a central question:

- › Do you understand humility? Do you understand the humility of Christ, and the call for his servants to be humble?

—The text is broken down into two main sections (the actual foot washing; the teaching).

Jesus' humility symbolizes his work (2-11)

- If you are a Christian who knows the Bible—this story likely did not hit you as surprising, or shocking. But it should amaze and surprise us—even if we've heard it a hundred times.

Look at vs 3 & 4 as a unity.

—A statement of Jesus's complete authority.

What would you do if you had all authority and power in the universe? Who would you command and order around? If you're honest, you have your list.

Yet look at the juxtaposition in vs 4.

Here we see a clear picture that the very nature of God is humility.

(V4) —this action alone would have been shocking.

During Jesus's time on the earth, a good host would provide a servant to wash the feet of the guests. There was obviously no one hired for this—and none of the disciples stepped up to the task.

Now peers did not wash each other's feet....it was a task for the lowest of servants.

- › And it would be unthinkable for a Rabbi to wash a student's feet.

What the disciples would have seen is Jesus stripping off his outer garment; he would have been dressed as a household slave.

I went to India once to do some ministry, discipleship, and training pastors. The man who led our trip taught NT at Southern Seminary.

When we were in India, the hotel we were staying at shorted us on rooms—so there were not enough beds.

But our leader knew how to solve the problem. He told the hotel management—“I'm a teacher, these are my students”.

Suddenly an extra room mysteriously opened up!

Why:

-- It's unthinkable in the Eastern culture for a teacher to share a room with students.

--It was unthinkable in Jewish life for the Rabbi to strip down to a slaves clothing and clean the dirt off the feet of his students.

- Peter is not afraid to speak up and protest (v8)

*It's not a good idea to tell Jesus no (thanks Peter!)

So what is the symbolism of bath and washing? (v10)

—Many in the early church taught that it referred to baptism (seems like a real stretch).

—Some have seen it as a reference to the cross, which is the cleansing work.

- It's sounds very appealing; but there is a problem. How can the disciples be clean when the sacrifice for sin had not been offered yet...unless it's some sort of pro-rated cleansing.

(15:3) Helps—

The washing/cleansing is the Word.

- In other words, I think it refers to regeneration by the Spirit.

Titus 3:5 ESV

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

- › Being clean/washed is being regenerated by the Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27; John 3:5)
—The foot washing is the ongoing life of discipleship, abiding, walking in the Spirit.
- Yet the act of foot washing is also a powerful symbol, “A parable to the eye”. (Matthew Henry)

The verb in 13:4 “laying aside” —is the same verb in the original that describes Jesus laying down his life.

John 10:11 ESV

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

- › Could there be a more clear, powerful picture of Christ’s love for his own??
The Shepherd/Master/Lord actually becoming a servant....who dies out of love.

(Phil 2:6-8)

Philippians 2:6–8 ESV

who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Do you understand the humility of Jesus? Do you embrace his service to you?

Often we talk about serving Jesus and giving our lives to Jesus Christ.

Yet salvation is grounded in the service of Jesus to us first.

Mark 10:45 ESV

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus’ humility sets the example for our own lives (12-15)

I found out this Christmas that WWJD bracelets have been making a comeback when they made it on one of my kids’ lists.

WWJD—What would Jesus do

The story behind those bracelets is a book *In His Steps*, which was written by a pastor who was a leader in the Social Gospel.

The flaw in what Shelton promoted is that Jesus was *just* a moral example, the Social Gospel movement deemphasized Jesus as a sacrifice for sin—salvation.

Not just bracelets, but also the social gospel is repackaged in our day (certain forms of social justice).

Jesus is so much more than a moral example....

Yet we can’t deny he sets the example; it’s clearly in the text, and in other places.

1 Peter 2:21 ESV

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

Starting in v12, Jesus takes back on the posture of teacher.

And that’s his main point. (v13-14)

Jesus’ humility sets the example for our lives...and he expects us to follow.

But what does following the example practically look like? Do we need to include this as an ordinance?

Did you know that in the Catholic Church, even the pope washes feet. He even did this past Easter.

Illus: From ABC News (4/14/22)

Pope visits Italian prison for Holy Week foot-washing ritual

ROME -- Pope Francis washed the feet of a dozen inmates at a prison near Rome in a Holy Thursday *ritual* that symbolizes humility and service.

“He arrived in a motorcade that included Italian police cars...80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Rome. The *ritual* was closed to the public for security reasons and to protect the privacy of the inmates.

Symbolizing the number of Jesus’ apostles, the twelve sat on chairs on a raised platform. The pontiff washed, dried, then kissed the feet of each of the inmates. Some inmates leaned over to kiss the pope’s hands in gratitude.”

Here is the issue—Jesus is not setting a ritual to follow; he is setting an example to follow so that we will live in real humble service to others. A ritual does not reveal a true heart of service.

Matthew Henry: “This is a parable to the eye”.

Questions to ask to know if I have a “foot washing” mindset?

—Are there people I’m looking down on, right now? (Remember: The target that the devil aims at is the heart.)

—Are there tasks that I deem not worthy of my time because they are too low for me? (Maybe at home?)

—Are there people that I deem not worthy of my time because I see them as too low for me?

—How do I view children and youth? Annoying noisemaking? Would I take the posture of serving them?

—If I had to literally wash the feet of people in this church, could I do it?

John Piper, on this text, says “Go low”.

How low will you go?

- Understanding humility is not based on how quick or slow of a learner we are; it comes down to if we are *actually doing it—actually engaging in real acts of service that benefit others—it’s really going low.*

Conclusion:

Do you understand the humility of Christ, and the humility that Jesus calls us to?

There are no more important aspects of our lives than love and humility.

“The poorest and most ignorant Christian can every day find occasion for practicing love and humility.”