



## Foot-washing Footsteps to Follow

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**Throughout the history** of the church, Maundy Thursday has been celebrated in remembrance of Jesus's last teaching to his disciples before he went to the cross. Its name comes from the Latin "mandatum" meaning "mandate" or "command."

On the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus spent time with all his disciples, celebrating the Passover meal and teaching them again what he was sent to earth to accomplish. The gospel of John records this narrative more fully than any other gospel and reveals to us a remarkable number of truths from and about Jesus.

Chapters 13-16 record an intimate time of fellowship, sadness, instruction, along with confusion and in the end, betrayal. But in this passage, one of the most surprising scenes of servant hood is also revealed with the humility of Jesus shown as his glory on full display.

John begins chapter 13 this way:

*"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."*

John 13:1 ESV

"Love" is a recurring theme throughout the whole of John's gospel as well as his letters. But here, Jesus is about to show a kind of love that is exemplary, meaning, leaving an example for his followers to follow.

Jesus knew his time on earth was short and he knew where he would soon be; nailed to a cross. So, how would he spend his time with his disciples knowing all this was soon to take place? What would he tell them? What example would he leave for them? What mandate would he give?

## What would you do differently if you knew your time on earth was short?

Look at what Jesus did...

*"During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 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. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."*

John 13:2-5 ESV

Jesus washing his disciples' feet? What on earth is going on here? If he washed his own feet, I could understand that. But washing other's feet? YUCK!

And yet, Jesus knew exactly what he was doing.

To wash something implies that it is dirty and needs to be cleaned. In a world where feet were the primary means of transportation for most and dusty roads led to dusty and dirty feet, it was common custom for people to wash their feet when entering a home and for obvious reasons.

But what Jesus was doing was different than just getting dust and dirt off his disciples' feet from their travels.

Peter felt the awkwardness of the moment and resisted. But Jesus responded that Peter wouldn't understand it in the moment, but would later. Peter self-righteously refused saying bluntly, "You shall never wash my feet!" But Jesus insisted saying if he didn't wash Peter's feet, Peter would have no share with Jesus. So, in a typical "Peter-esque" way, he asks Jesus to cleanse his hands and head too!

Jesus then assures him that he is already "clean," though not all there were clean, speaking of Judas who would soon betray him. But though the eleven were already clean in that they were true followers of Christ, there was still a need for a kind of "cleansing," a kind of "foot-washing" that would be a true act of humility and servant-hood for them follow in Jesus's humble footsteps.

*“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 have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”*

John 13:12–17 ESV

Jesus was THE Teacher and THE Lord. He knows this and his disciples knew this. How is it then that the Teacher and the Lord is washing feet?

Because the way of Jesus is different. His exaltation is bathed in humility. His glory is sopping wet with servant hood. He does what people don’t expect of Him and goes against every fiber of our prideful being as humans, instead of exalting Himself, he humbles himself, taking the form of a servant, though He is God incarnate.

Jesus gives his disciples an obligation; a mandate. If the greater “Teacher” and “Lord” has done this, how would his disciples respond? Was Jesus just trying to get them to do something that would humiliate them? No. But he was calling them to a kind of humility in which is great blessing.

The world and the flesh are not naturally inclined toward humility. We like to be exalted, not humbled. And yet, the way to blessing from Jesus’s lips is through true humility and servant hood, not self-exaltation.

Jesus emphasizes that those who follow in His foot-washing footsteps would be blessed, not if they mentally ascent to the idea of humility and servant hood, but to the practice. It is in the doing that we are blessed.

**It’s easy to affirm “foot-washing” in theory. It’s doing it that makes the prideful flesh die.**

But Jesus is not aiming for a bunch of heads full of theories. He is calling His disciples to action. He expects them to do to each other as He has done.

The mandate that Jesus gave his disciples is not confined to washing each other’s feet. It is symbolic of doing to each other that which is necessary to keep us

connected in a relationship of humility, servant hood, and love for each other and for Christ.

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

John 13:34–35 ESV

This text clearly and pointedly proves that the mandate he is giving to his disciples is rooted in and fulfilled by mutual love for each other with the kind of love Jesus had for them.

He goes so far as to say that our witness to the world will be explicitly tied to and revealed in the way that we love each other. As the world watches on, do they see those who follow Christ living as every other person in the world lives? Do we just love those who love us? Do we just love who we want and the rest are just for somebody else to love?

**Remember that Jesus even washed the feet of Judas, His betrayer.**

What an example of love, not on the basis of Judas deserving the love, but as an act of humility and servant hood, even to His enemy.

True followers of Christ will know the joy of loving service to the Body of Christ and no task or act of kindness will be beneath our status.

After all, has our Teacher and Lord not left us a Supreme example, not only to see, but to follow in his foot-washing footsteps as His mandate and for our blessing?

*Do we recoil at the idea of washing feet?*

*What needs to change in our hearts and minds so that we believe Jesus when he says there is blessing in our doing?*

*What are some ways the Lord is giving us the opportunity and privilege of washing someone’s feet?*

*Am I willing to follow the example of Jesus’s humble servant hood or am I too good for feet?*

May God grant us the grace to love each—feet and all—and do whatever is needed to show this Christ to the watching world, for His glory and our good!