

## Love on its Knees

### John 13:1-17

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

**“By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another”** (John 13:35). Living a generation of gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant people who invent ways of doing evil unto others to promote their self-interests (Romans 1:30), it is incredibly difficult for a Christian to feel and demonstrate love that is patient, kind, does not boast or dishonor others, is not proud, keeps no records of wrongs and is not self-seeking (1 Corinthians 13:4)! When people gossip, slander and try to destroy us our first inclination is not to love and pray for the perpetrators of life (Matthew 5:43-45) but to retaliate and repay evil for evil (Romans 12:17). While one would like to think that our lack of love relates only to the world who hates us Christians for our beliefs (John 15:18-19), that is simply not true for inside the church one need not look very hard to find more than one member clamouring for positions of power and authority (Mark 10:42) and others whom choose only to love those who love them! This sermon is going to review the story of Jesus washing the disciple’s feet and in doing so will emphasize how important it is to love while on one’s knees as His servant!

### An Example of Past Deliverance (13:1a)

#### It was just before the Passover Festival



The temporal setting for the foot washing was the day of preparation before the Passover Festival.<sup>1</sup> The Last Supper was not a Passover meal but a meal Jesus and the disciples shared the Thursday night before the Crucifixion.<sup>2</sup> During this seven-day festival each Jewish household<sup>3</sup> would slaughter a male lamb without defect, put some of its blood on the tops and sides the doorframes of their homes and eat the meat of the lamb with unleavened bread (Exodus 12:1-30). This was done to remember and celebrate their “Exodus from Egypt and the bounty of divine

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2005), 365.

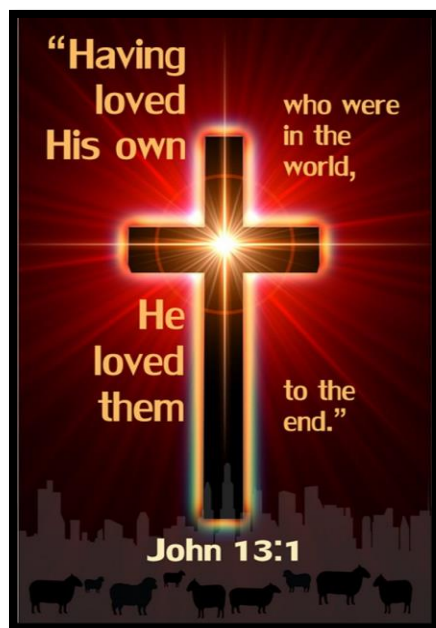
<sup>2</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *John*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 245.

<sup>3</sup> Unless the number of people in your home could not eat a whole lamb. In this case they could share a lamb with a neighboring household.

redemption”<sup>4</sup> they had received. God’s chosen people were to remember the plagues of the blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and especially the death of the firstborn! Imagine the relief and joy the Jewish people felt when God not only passed them over for judgment but also delivered them from the hands of persecution under Pharaoh! John alludes to the nearness of this Passover to remind the Jewish people that the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) was about to be slain and in doing so provide redemption for not just them but the entire world! <sup>5</sup>

## A Dying Love (13:1b)

**Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**



Despite knowing that the disciples would soon abandon Him (Mark 14:50), His chosen people would yell “crucify Him” (Luke 23:21) and the Gentile courts would fail Him (23:24); Jesus loved them until the very end! Even though in this passage “His own” refers specifically to the disciples,<sup>6</sup> in the larger context of the New Testament “His own” also refers to all of humanity for Christ died once and for all (1 Peter 3:18)! This time God would not wrestle against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12) of a leader like Pharaoh but His Son would wrestle against the Prince of this World (John 12:31)! During the Last Supper Jesus knew<sup>7</sup> the time had come to glorify God by breaking the chains of sin that were oppressing humanity (Romans 8:2) through His substitutionary death on the cross.<sup>8</sup> Despite the world or His own people not recognizing Him (John 1:10-12),<sup>9</sup> His love was unconditional and knew no boundaries,<sup>10</sup> for Jesus died even for His enemies (Romans 5:10). O the ingratitude of

God’s chosen people to spill the blood of the Lamb, the Son of whom saved them at the first Passover!

<sup>4</sup> Baruch M. Bokser, [“Unleavened Bread and Passover, Feasts of.”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 755.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, [“John.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, [“John.”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 135.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to John](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 545.

<sup>8</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, [John](#), vol. 36, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 232.

<sup>9</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, [John](#), 245.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to John](#), 545–546.

This brings me to my **first point**: Christians will be known as Jesus’ disciples by our unconditional love for all people. While it is easy to selectively love those who love us it is quite another thing to unconditionally love all people, especially our enemies! Does God really



want us to love those who gossip, slander and try to destroy us (Romans 1:30)? The answer is yes. To imitate the love of Christ who died once and for all means that in the face of one’s enemies one must resist the “worldly” temptation to retaliate against one’s “perpetrators” with unkind and dishonourable words and deeds (1 Corinthians 13:4). It is a sin to praise our Lord and Father while cursing human beings made in the likeness of God (James 3:9)! He who had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) could have avoided the cross altogether and given humanity what we

rightly deserved, God’s wrath; and yet He chose (John 10:18) to love by opening His arms wide and dying not only for “His own” but for His enemies as well! If we as Christians only love those who love us and hate our enemies, then how is our love any different than the discretionary love this world has to offer and how are we any more holy than the perpetrators of this world who do evil to crush another?

### Love is Rooted in God, not Self (13:2-3)

**<sup>2</sup> The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God**



Contained in these verses are two different and diametrically opposed reactions to persecution by one’s enemies. Realizing that Jesus’ enemies were “implacably hostile and politically powerful,” Judas gave into the Devil’s prompting and chose to promote his own self preservation by betraying Jesus<sup>11</sup> to the Jewish authorities. He gave into the Satanic plot to crucify Jesus in hopes of increasing the odds of self-preservation but in doing<sup>12</sup> so Satan entered him, and he came

<sup>11</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, “John,” 136.

<sup>12</sup> D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 2181.

under his control.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, in the face of crucifixion Jesus chose to obey God whom had placed all things under His power.<sup>14</sup> He whom was “empowered to fulfill the sovereign will of God in judgement and salvation did not fear persecution and death because the Devil himself could not destroy but be subservient to God’s sovereign plans.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus could have chosen a flashy confrontation with the Devil<sup>16</sup> but instead chose to die as an atonement for all of humanity.<sup>17</sup>

This brings me to my **second point**: those whom put God first will be known as His disciples. In Matthew 22:37-38 we are told that while we are to unconditionally love all people as stated in point one, the greatest commandment given in Scripture is to love God! To be one



of Jesus’ disciples our love for God must go beyond simple platitudes of occasionally reading the Bible and praying to those whom are both hearers and doers of His word (James 1:22) in the face of blessings and persecution! Christ’s love must compel us to be like Jesus and humbly submit to the will of the Father by allowing Him to renew our minds and actions daily (Romans 12:1-2). To be a living sacrifice means that though we are often hard pressed on every side, perplexed and persecuted (2 Corinthians 4:8) by a world that hates the light within us (John 3:20), we as His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) stand firm on the Rock of our salvation (Psalms 89:26) and obey His

will rather than seek and find an easy way to appease this world. True disciples of Christ deny “self-interests” to make room in their hearts for the complete filling of the Spirit and subsequent submission to His will!

### Love is Action (4-5)

**<sup>4</sup> so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.**

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<sup>13</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, “John,” 136.

<sup>14</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 546.

<sup>15</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 233.

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” 2181.

<sup>17</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 1009.

My **third point** is that true disciples of Christ put their love into action. In response to the disciple's earlier argument concerning which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24-27),<sup>18</sup>



Jesus demonstrated a servant's heart by rising from the table, taking off His outer clothing, wrapping a towel around His waist, pouring water into a basin and washing the disciple's feet. To break through the disciple's preoccupation the upcoming persecution and crucifixion,<sup>19</sup> Jesus needed to get their attention. By washing the feet of those of inferior status<sup>20</sup> Jesus not only got the disciple's attention but in doing so taught them that their focus was not to obtain a position of power and authority but to humbly serve and love others!<sup>21</sup> How dramatic would

today's church be changed if only its members would not covet power but instead see loving each member as being their primary focus? How dramatic would our impact be on society if only we went from talking to humbly doing outreach in our community on our knees?

### **Love is Receiving and Proclaiming Forgiveness (6-11)**

**<sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" <sup>7</sup> Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." <sup>8</sup> "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." <sup>9</sup> "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" <sup>10</sup> Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." <sup>11</sup> For He knew who was going to betray Him, and that was why He said not every one was clean.**

This brings me to my **fourth point**: true disciples of Christ receive and proclaim forgiveness of sin. When Jesus comes to wash Peter's feet, he objects on the grounds that the Son of God should not take on such a menial, servant's task.<sup>22</sup> Jesus tells Peter that it would only be later, most likely upon the receipt and illumination of the Holy Spirit,<sup>23</sup> that he would

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<sup>18</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 547.

<sup>19</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, 1008.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*,.

<sup>21</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, 1010.

<sup>22</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* 548.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

fully<sup>24</sup> understand the foot washing as being parabolic of the cleansing of sin<sup>25</sup> offered by Jesus through His redemptive death and resurrection.<sup>26</sup> Jesus would soon “pour out His blood for the washing away of human sin by the atonement.”<sup>27</sup> Jesus objected to Peter’s request for his whole



body to be washed due to the fact that a “justified person needs only cleansing from the contaminated effects of sin” while the unbeliever needs a full washing, i.e. born again, as symbolized through baptism to be pardoned from sin’s penalty, spiritual death.<sup>28</sup> The atonement and forgiveness of sins is the Good News the disciples and us today are to offer to the world!<sup>29</sup> If we are to love like Jesus did then we need proclaim to believers that they still sin and need to be washed and forgiven by Jesus (1 John 1:9) and to unbelievers the Good News is that through belief in the atoning sacrifice of

Christ they can be washed by His blood, born again and eternally adopted into His family. Those who love like Jesus did spread this Good News far and wide while on their knees!

### Loving with a Servant’s Heart (12-17)

**12 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. 13 “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.**

This brings me to my **final point**: to be one of Jesus’ disciples means having a servant’s heart in both thought and action! In the last few verses of this passage Jesus explained the main point of the foot washing: since your Lord and Teacher was willing to do a menial task in order to teach the disciples about forgiveness of sins, they too should see no task that God asks them to do to be beneath them.<sup>30</sup> The disciples are not to go into the world and preach the Good News

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<sup>24</sup> Even though Jesus explained the purpose of the foot washing in verses 12-17 it is unlikely the disciples fully grasped it’s meaning until after Jesus’ death and resurrection when they had received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>25</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, [“John,”](#) 136.

<sup>26</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, [John](#), 234.

<sup>27</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#), 1010.

<sup>28</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#), 1011.

<sup>29</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, [The Gospel according to Saint John](#), 369.

<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to John](#), 551.

with a sense of superiority but with the status of “slaves” or “men sent!”<sup>31</sup> Christ-inspired love<sup>32</sup> will enable the sheep to go amongst the wolves and be wise as serpents but gentle as doves (Matthew 10:16) because they know they did not buy their salvation, Jesus bought them (1 Corinthians 6:20)! Just as Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, so are we to wash the feet of one another.<sup>33</sup> This will not be an easy task for the dirt and waste of the footprints of our souls can only be washed by water of the right temperature.<sup>34</sup> If we proclaim the Good News with too hot a water the light will illuminate their sins too brightly and might come off as condensing and if the water is too cold the person might say the Good News is too cold and formal.<sup>35</sup> The Good News is best proclaimed with an attitude of a humble servant who believes and says “I was once where you were and Jesus saved a wretch like me.”



**Challenge:** There are people that you know whether family, friends or colleagues whom desperately need to hear the Good News! They are dying in their sins and you have a lifeline from Jesus Christ that you can throw them. In great humility and a servant’s heart show them how much you love He who bought you at a price by washing their feet in His love! You just might get the honor and privilege of getting the greatest gift of all this Christmas, seeing a person become born again!

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<sup>31</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to John](#), 552.

<sup>32</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, [John](#), 236.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, [The Gospel according to Saint John](#), 372.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, [The Gospel according to Saint John](#), 367.

<sup>35</sup> James Montgomery Boice, [The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary](#), 1012.