

John 13:1-20
October 12, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

I'd have to say that some of the most beautiful Christians I know are the ones who are truly humble. I remember a sweet deacon named Herb Stange, who was a deacon at my church where I served on staff in KS. He had such a sweet spirit in him; he had no desire to be recognized; he loved Jesus with all of his heart and spoke in ways that showed the depth of his walk with the Lord without any form of arrogance. Those were just a few of his traits! So here's what I'm wondering:

Q: How do we grow to develop a true spirit of humility? What are your thoughts on this? [Let people engage]

Transition: I bet all of us desire this trait, but I think if we're all honest, most of us have quite a way to go, especially me! In today's passage, Jesus models humility. He is going to level the playing field and teach his disciples that no one is ranked higher than another. Everyone is equally valued and should be freely serving one another. Jesus does not leave room for pride! Let's read the text to see what He teaches His disciples.

BOOK:

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

13 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love (or he loved them to the last).

²The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.

¹²When 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. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as

I have done for you. ¹⁶I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

¹⁸“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me (Ps 41:9).’

¹⁹“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. ²⁰I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility. The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge, but not in grace (see 2 Peter 3:18). “Humility is the only soil in which the graces root,” wrote Andrew Murray. “The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure.”

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 344-347). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE SOVEREIGN SERVANT - John 13:1–20

Three times in my ministry I have had to deliver “farewell messages” to congregations I had served, and it is not an easy thing to do. I may not have succeeded, but my purpose was always to prepare them for the future. This included warning as well as instruction. They would call a new pastor and enter into a new phase of ministry, and I wanted them to be at their best.

John 13–17 is our Lord’s “farewell message” to His beloved disciples, climaxing with His intercessory prayer for them and for us. Other farewell addresses in Scripture were delivered by Moses (Deut. 31–33), Joshua (Josh. 23–24), and Paul (Acts 20). However, Jesus added a significant “action section” to His message when He washed His disciples’ feet. It was an object lesson they would never forget.

In this passage, we see our Lord in a fourfold relationship: to His Heavenly Father (John 13:1–5), to Simon Peter (John 13:6–11), to all of the disciples (John 13:12–17), and to Judas (John 13:18–35). In each of these sections of John’s Gospel, you will discover a special message, a spiritual truth to help you in your own Christian life.

Humility: Jesus and the Father (John 13:1–5)

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Sunday, and on Monday had cleansed the temple. Tuesday was a day of conflict as the religious leaders sought to trip Him up and get evidence to arrest Him. These events are recorded in Matthew 21–25. Wednesday was probably a day of rest, but on Thursday He met in the Upper Room with His disciples in order to observe Passover.

The emphasis in John 13:1–3 is on *what our Lord knew*, and in John 13:4–5 on *what our Lord did*. Jesus knew that “His hour was come.” More than any of the Gospel writers, John emphasized the fact that Jesus lived on a “heavenly timetable” as He did the Father’s will. Note the development of this theme:

2:4—“Mine hour is not yet come.”

7:30—“His hour was not yet come.”

8:20—“His hour was not yet come.”

12:23—“The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.”

13:1—“Jesus knew that His hour was come.”

17:1—“Father, the hour is come.”

What was this divinely appointed “hour?” It was the time when He would be glorified through His death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view, it meant suffering; but from the divine point of view, it meant glory. He would soon leave this world and return to the Father who sent Him, Jesus having finished His work on earth (John 17:4). When the servant of God is in the will of God, he is immortal until his work is done. They could not even arrest Jesus, let alone kill Him, until the right hour had arrived.

Jesus also knew that Judas would betray Him. Judas is mentioned eight times in John’s Gospel, more than in any of the other Gospels. Satan had entered into Judas (Luke 22:3), and now he would give him the necessary thought to bring about the arrest and crucifixion of the Son of God. The word translated “put” in John 13:2 literally means “to throw.” It reminds us of the fiery darts

of the wicked one (Eph. 6:16). Judas was an unbeliever (John 6:64–71), so he did not have a “shield of faith” to use to ward off Satan’s attacks.

Finally, Jesus knew that the Father had given Him all things (John 13:3). This statement parallels John 3:35, and it also reminds us of Matthew 11:27. Even in His humiliation, our Lord had all things through His Father. He was poor and yet He was rich. Because Jesus knew who He was, where He came from, what He had, and where He was going, He was complete master of the situation. You and I as believers know that we have been born of God, that we are one day going to God, and that in Christ we have all things; therefore, we ought to be able to follow our Lord’s example and serve others.

What Jesus knew helped determine *what Jesus did* (John 13:4–5). The disciples must have been shocked when they saw their Master rise from supper, lay aside His outer garments, wrap a towel around His waist, take a basin of water, and wash their feet. Jewish servants did not wash their masters’ feet, though Gentile slaves might do it. It was a menial task, and yet Jesus did it! As a special mark of affection, a host or hostess might wash a guest’s feet, but it was not standard operating procedure in most homes.

Jesus knew that there was a competitive spirit in the hearts of His disciples. In fact, within a few minutes, the men were disputing over which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24–30). He gave them an unforgettable lesson in humility, and by His actions rebuked their selfishness and pride. The more you think about this scene, the more profound it becomes. It is certainly an illustration of what Paul wrote years later in Philippians 2:1–16. Peter must have recalled the event when he wrote his first epistle and urged his readers to “be clothed with humility” (1 Peter 5:5).

Too often we confuse “the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3) with the “poor-spirited,” and true humility with timidity and inferiority. The British literary giant Samuel Johnson was once asked to prepare a funeral sermon for a girl who had died, and he asked what her special virtues were. He was told that she was kind to her inferiors. Johnson replied that this was commendable, but that it would be difficult to determine who her inferiors were!

The Father had put all things into the Son’s hands, *yet Jesus picked up a towel and a basin!* His humility was not born of poverty, but of riches. He was rich, yet He became poor (2 Cor. 8:9). A Malay proverb says, “The fuller the ear is of rice-grain, the lower it bends.”

It is remarkable how the Gospel of John reveals the humility of our Lord even while magnifying His deity: “The Son can do nothing of Himself” (John 5:19, 30). “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will” (John 6:38). “My doctrine is not Mine” (John 7:16). “And I seek not Mine own glory” (John 8:50). “The word which ye hear is not Mine” (John 14:24). His ultimate expression of humility was His death on the cross.

Jesus was the Sovereign, yet He took the place of a servant. He had all things in His hands, yet He picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet He served His followers. It has well been said that humility is not thinking meanly of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all. True humility grows out of our relationship with the Father. If our desire is to know and do the

Father's will so that we might glorify His name, then we will experience the joy of following Christ's example and serving others.

We today, just like the disciples that night, desperately need this lesson on humility. The church is filled with a worldly spirit of competition and criticism as believers vie with one another to see who is the greatest. We are growing in knowledge, but not in grace (see 2 Peter 3:18). "Humility is the only soil in which the graces root," wrote Andrew Murray. "The lack of humility is the sufficient explanation of every defect and failure."

Jesus served His disciples because of His humility and because of His love. Contrast John 13:1 with 1:11 and 3:16: Jesus came "unto His own [world], and His own [people] received him not." "For God so loved the world." In the Upper Room, Jesus ministered in love to His own disciples, and they received Him and what He had to say. The Greek text says, "He loved them to the uttermost."

Holiness: Jesus and Peter (John 13:6–11)

As Peter watched the Lord wash his friends' feet, he became more and more disturbed and could not understand what He was doing. As you read the life of Christ in the Gospels, you cannot help but notice how Peter often spoke impulsively out of his ignorance and had to be corrected by Jesus. Peter opposed Jesus going to the cross (Matt. 16:21–23), and he tried to manage our Lord's affairs at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1–8). He expressed the faith of the disciples (John 6:66–71) without realizing that one of the number was a traitor.

The word translated "wash" in John 13:5–6, 8, 12, and 14 is *nipito* and means "to wash a part of the body." But the word translated "washed" in John 13:10 is *louo* and means "to bathe all over." The distinction is important, for Jesus was trying to teach His disciples the importance of a holy walk.

When the sinner trusts the Savior, he is "bathed all over" and his sins are washed away and forgiven (see 1 Cor. 6:9–11; Titus 3:3–7; and Rev. 1:5). "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). However, as the believer walks in this world, it is easy to become defiled. He does not need to be bathed all over again; he simply needs to have that defilement cleansed away. God promises to cleanse us when we confess our sins to Him (1 John 1:9).

But why is it so important that we "keep our feet clean"? Because if we are defiled, we cannot have communion with our Lord. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me" (John 13:8). The word translated "part" is *meros*, and it carries the meaning here of "participation, having a share in someone or something." When God "bathes us all over" in salvation, He brings about our *union* with Christ; and that is a settled relationship that cannot change. (The verb *wash* in John 13:10 is in the perfect tense. It is settled once and for all.) However, our *communion* with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). If we permit unconfessed sin in our lives, we hinder our walk with the Lord; and that is when we need to have our feet washed.

This basic truth of Christian living is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament priesthood. When the priest was consecrated, he was bathed all over (Ex. 29:4), and that experience was never repeated. However, during his daily ministry, he became defiled; so it was necessary that he wash his hands and feet at the brass laver in the courtyard (Ex. 30:18–21). Only then could he enter the holy place and trim the lamps, eat the holy bread, or burn the incense.

The Lord cleanses us through the blood of Christ, that is, His work on the cross (1 John 1:5–10), and through the application of His Word to our lives (Ps. 119:9; John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–26). The “water of the Word” can keep our hearts and minds clean so that we will avoid the pollutions of this world. But if we do sin, we have a loving Advocate in glory who will hear our prayers of confession and forgive us (1 John 2:1–2).

Peter did not understand what his Lord was doing; but instead of waiting for an explanation, he impulsively tried to tell the Lord what to do. There is a strong double negative in John 13:8. The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest translated Peter’s statement, “You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never” (wuest). Peter really meant it! Then when he discovered that to refuse the Lord would mean to lose the Lord’s fellowship, he went in the opposite direction and asked for a complete bath!

We can learn an important lesson from Peter: don’t question the Lord’s will or work, and don’t try to change it. He knows what He is doing. Peter had a difficult time accepting Christ’s ministry to him *because Peter was not yet ready to minister to the other disciples*. It takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve us. The beautiful thing about a submissive spirit is that it can both give and receive to the glory of God.

John was careful to point out that Peter and Judas were in a different relationship with Jesus. Yes, Jesus washed Judas’ feet! But it did Judas no good because he had not been bathed all over. Some people teach that Judas was a saved man who sinned away his salvation, but that is not what Jesus said. Our Lord made it very clear that Judas had never been cleansed from his sins and was an unbeliever (John 6:64–71).

It is a wonderful thing to deepen your fellowship with the Lord. The important thing is to be honest with Him and with ourselves and keep our feet clean.

Happiness: Jesus and the Disciples (John 13:12–17)

John 13:17 is the key—“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” The sequence is important: humbleness, holiness, then happiness. Aristotle defined happiness as “good fortune joined to virtue ... a life that is both agreeable and secure.” That might do for a philosopher, but it will never do for a Christian believer! Happiness is the by-product of a life that is lived in the will of God. When we humbly serve others, walk in God’s paths of holiness, and do what He tells us, then we will enjoy happiness.

Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had done, and it is not likely that they did. So, He explained it: He had given them a lesson in humble service, an example for them to follow. The world thinks that happiness is the result of others serving us, but real joy comes

when we serve others in the name of Christ. The world is constantly pursuing happiness, but that is like chasing a shadow: it is always just beyond your reach.

Jesus was their Master, so He had every right to command their service. Instead, He served them! He gave them an example of true Christian ministry. On more than one occasion during the previous three years, He had taught them lessons about humility and service; but now He had demonstrated the lesson to them. Perhaps the disciples remembered His lesson about the child (Matt. 18:1–6), or the rebuke He gave James and John when they asked for thrones (Matt. 20:20–28). Now it was all starting to fall into place.

The servant (slave) is not greater than his master; so, if the master becomes a slave, where does that put the slave? *On the same level as the master!* By becoming a servant, our Lord did not push us down: He lifted us up! He dignified sacrifice and service. You must keep in mind that the Romans had no use for humility, and the Greeks despised manual labor. Jesus combined these two when He washed the disciples' feet.

The world asks, "How many people work for you?" but the Lord asks, "For how many people do you work?" When I was ministering at a conference in Kenya, an African believer shared one of their proverbs with me: "The chief is servant of all." How true it is that we need leaders who will serve and servants who will lead. G.K. Chesterton said that a really great man is one who makes others feel great, and Jesus did this with His disciples *by teaching them to serve*.

However, it is not enough just to *know* this truth; we must put it into practice. James 1:22–27 makes it clear that the blessing comes in the *doing* of the Word, not the hearing. Wuest translates the last phrase in James 1:25, "This man shall be prospered spiritually in his doing." Even studying this section in John's Gospel can stir us emotionally or enlighten us intellectually; but it cannot bless us spiritually until we do what Jesus told us to do. This is the only way to lasting happiness.

Be sure to keep these lessons in their proper sequence: humbleness, holiness, happiness. Submit to the Father, keep your life clean, and serve others. This is God's formula for true spiritual joy.

Hypocrisy: Jesus and Judas (John 13:18–20)

A dark shadow now fell across the scene as Jesus dealt with Judas, the traitor. It is important to note that Judas was not a true believer; he was a hypocrite. He had never believed in Jesus (John 6:64–71), he had not been bathed all over (John 13:10–11), and he had not been among the chosen ones whom the Father gave to the Son (John 13:18 and 17:12). How close a person can come to salvation and yet be lost forever! Judas was even the treasurer of the group (John 12:6) and was certainly held in high regard by his fellow disciples.

At that hour, Jesus had two great concerns: to fulfill the Word of God (John 13:18–30) and to magnify the glory of God (John 13:31–35).

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 319-321) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet (13:1–17)

John's Gospel reports more of the content of Jesus' instructions to His disciples than do the other three Gospels. Chapters 13–17 concentrate on His teachings on that fateful night in which He was arrested. Before the instruction, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and predicted His betrayal.

13:1. **Jesus knew that the time had come** (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30; 12:23, 27; 17:1) **for Him to leave this world and go to the Father**. Jesus' death and resurrection were now imminent. He had come to die in obedience to the Father's will. His coming was also an act of love for all mankind (3:16). But He has a special love for His sheep: **He loved His own**. Then **He showed them the full extent of His love**. His humble service (13:1–17), His teaching (13:18–17:26), and finally His death (chaps. 18–19) are in view. All three revealed His love.

13:2–4. **At the evening meal** before the Passover, **the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot ... to betray Jesus**. Jesus had predicted this (6:70–71). Later Satan actually entered Judas (13:27). Yet **God** was in control of all events leading to Jesus' death. Jesus **knew** (cf. vv. 1, 18) His sovereign authority, His origin, and coming destiny; yet He voluntarily took the place of a slave, washing the feet of His disciples. His action contrasts sharply with their self-seeking (cf. Matt. 20:20–24; Mark 9:33–34; Luke 22:24–30) and pictures His whole ministry on earth (cf. Phil. 2:5–8).

13:5. Foot-washing was needed in Palestine. The streets were dusty and people wore sandals without socks or stockings. It was a mark of honor for a host to provide a servant to wash a guest's feet; it was a breach of hospitality not to provide for it (cf. 1 Sam. 25:41; Luke 7:40–50; 1 Tim. 5:10). Wives often washed their husbands' feet, and children washed their parents' feet. Most people, of course, had to **wash** their own **feet**.

13:6–8. **Peter** sensing Jesus' reversing of their natural roles, asked why He, Peter's **Lord**, should **wash the feet** of His servant Peter. In Peter's question the word **You** is emphatic in the Greek. **Jesus** said that **later** (after His death and resurrection) Peter would **understand**. No ... You shall never wash my feet, Peter replied. Apparently he did not feel that Jesus should act like a servant toward Peter. This is another case of Peter's thoughtless speech (cf. Mark 8:32; 9:5). **Jesus** responded, **Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me**. This does not mean, "Unless you are baptized you cannot be saved," but, "Unless I wash your sins away by My atoning death (cf. Rev. 1:5) you have no real relationship to Me" (cf. 1 John 1:7).

13:9–10. **Peter** continued to miss the spiritual lesson, but he was certain of his desire to be joined to Jesus. Therefore he asked Jesus to wash his **hands** and **head as well** as his **feet**. **Jesus answered, A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean**. (Some Greek manuscripts omit the words "his feet.") Roman Catholics sometimes have interpreted verse 10 to mean that after infant baptism only penance is needed. A preferable interpretation is that after salvation all one needs is confession of sins, the continual application of Jesus' death to cleanse one's daily sins (cf. 1 John 1:7; 2:1–2). When Jesus added that **not every one of you is clean**, He was referring to Judas (cf. John 13:11, 18). This suggests that Judas was not converted.

13:11. Judas had rejected the life-giving, cleansing words of Jesus (cf. 6:63; 15:3), so he was yet in his sins. Judas did have his feet literally washed, but he did not enter into the meaning of the event. John stressed Jesus' supernatural knowledge (cf. 2:25; 4:29) of Judas' deception.

13:12–14. After giving this object lesson in humility the Lord questioned the disciples in order to draw out the significance of the lesson: **Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them** (cf. v. 7). **Teacher** (*didaskalos*) and **Lord** (*kyrios*) show that Jesus is on a higher level than they. Yet He had done a humble service for them. Meeting others' needs self-sacrificially is what they ought to do too.

13:15–16. The foot-washing was **an example** (*hypodeigma*, "pattern"). Many groups throughout church history have practiced literal foot-washing as a church ordinance. However, present culture in many lands does not call for the need to wash dust from the feet of one's guests. Whereas the Lord's Supper was practiced by the early church as an ordinance, it apparently did not practice foot-washing as an ordinance in church gatherings. This passage emphasizes inner humility, not a physical rite. A Christian widow's practice of "washing the feet of the saints" (1 Tim. 5:10) speaks not of her involvement in a church ordinance but of her humble slave-like service to other believers. Not to follow the example of Jesus is to exalt oneself above Him and to live in pride. **No servant is greater than his master** (cf. John 12:26).

13:17. God blesses His servants not for what they **know** but for their responses to what they know. Christian happiness (**you will be blessed**) comes through obedient service (**if you do them**, i.e., **these things** Jesus commanded).

2. Jesus' prediction of his betrayal (13:18–20).

13:18–19. Jesus had just said that blessedness comes through obedience (v. 17). Now He added that there would be no blessedness for one of the disciples. His selection of Judas was not an accident or a failure in God's plan. Jesus chose a betrayer among His 12 disciples (cf. 6:70–71) in order **to fulfill the Scripture**, namely, Psalm 41:9. As David was betrayed by his trusted table companion Ahithophel, who then hanged himself (2 Sam. 16:20–17:3, 23), so Judas, Jesus' close companion, betrayed Him and then hanged himself. Though Judas' deed was foreknown by God, he was fully culpable. The fact that Jesus knew all this in advance (**before it happens**) and that it fit the Scriptures helped the disciples after the fact to **believe** God sent Jesus (John 13:19; cf. 14:29).

13:20. As Jesus has a high and holy dignity because of His commission from the Father, so the disciples represented Jesus. **Anyone** who accepted the disciples was thus accepting Jesus, the **One** they represented, and in turn that person was also accepting the Father.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 13:1-20. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.