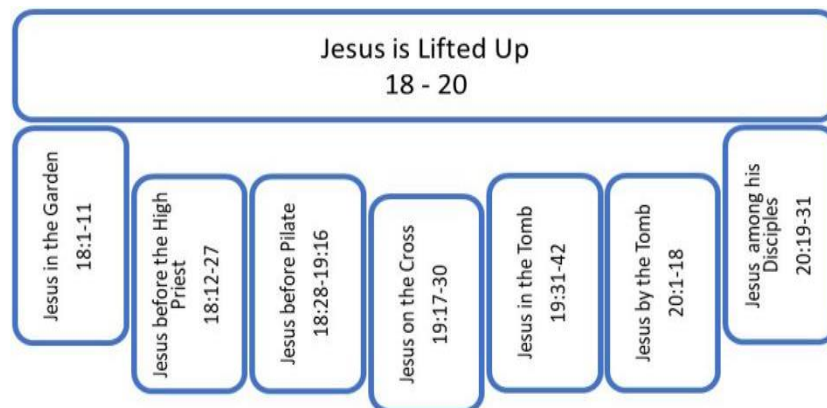


Lesson 21: John 13:1-20 Jesus Sanctifies His Disciples

Introduction



The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, John 12:23, so I want to say that we have come to the end of John, but we are really just past half-way. We have come to the second major part of John, “The Hour of His Glory.” The second half of the Gospel. And at the same time, it is the end. The whole second half is the end. The first part of John covered a little over two years. This part is going to take place in only a few days. This is a record of the end. And knowing this is the end, Jesus prepares his disciples. That is our title for this first section of this second part of John. This section covers chapters 13-17.

In titling this section “Jesus Prepares His Disciples”, I have in mind that Jesus is preparing them for the shocking tragedy of the cross that is just about to happen, but even more that Jesus is preparing them for a life of service lived out with him. It is just not going to be lived out with him physically present among them. And that’s going to be a huge transition for these men. Jesus has sent them out in pairs to do ministry. But they always reported back to him. He was always there to plan the direction and strategy of the ministry. He answered all the tough questions. He did the crisis management. He led. Now he is going away.

In some ways what is coming is like the death of a parent. Jesus, who could always be relied on, who was always the adult in the room, is leaving. And he is not coming back. In another way what is coming is like the transition of a child moving to college. Jesus has so much to tell his disciples. These are the most densely packed chapters in the Gospel. If you have a red-letter Bible showing you the words of Jesus in red, half of chapter 13 is red. And then, pretty much everything else is red, from 14 all the way through 17. Just a few questions from the disciples. Jesus has a lot to say here. And yet, like with a child going off to college, you can never say enough. These things have to be lived through. You can’t do it for them. Really, Jesus has been preparing them for this moment all along. This is the final moment of preparation. But preparation is still only preparation. They’ve got to live it out. Understanding, growth, wisdom - these are going to come from living out life, from success and failure and coming back to reflect on the word of Jesus and then heading out again for more success and failure.

The value of this section for us is tremendous. This is Jesus’ perspective on discipleship. That’s what we’re looking at here. And this preparation is not just for them, it’s also for us. This is the nature of discipleship, this is how you follow Jesus. And just like for them, the fruit’s going to come not from studying this; we have to take it in so we can live it out. And if we apply what we see in these chapters, we will grow in our ability to live with Jesus. We will grow in understanding and wisdom. Jesus promised in 10:10 that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly. How do we experience that abundant life? Does it just come? He promised in 8:31 that if we abide in his word, then we are truly his disciples, and through abiding in his word we will come to know the truth and the truth shall make us free. We experience freedom and abundance by abiding in the word of Jesus, the specific words that he has for us disciples. To abide is not just to reflect on, but is also to live out.

We reflect, we chew on his word but then we live out his word, that's how we abide in the word. These chapters provide concentrated teaching from Jesus on the true nature of discipleship. True disciples reflect on these things and put them into practice. The fruit is abundant life.

So, how does Jesus prepare his disciples for what comes next? To take in Jesus' teaching in these five chapters, we need to recognize what genre of literature we are dealing with and what structure is being used to order the text. First, the genre. Studying through the Gospel of John when you get into chapter 13 everything slows down considerably. If you are not mentally prepared for that, reading these chapters is difficult. That's because there is a genre shift. Except for the prologue, everything we have studied in the first twelve chapters fits into the genre of narrative. It has been action and dialogue. Jesus is either performing a miracle or he is speaking to an individual or to a crowd. And narrative is the easiest genre to read in large chunks. It is as though our brains are hardwired for story. We love story. We will have two scenes of action and dialogue in chapter 13, but after that Jesus is going to start teaching, and he's going to teach all the way through the end of chapter 17. We have shifted from the narrative genre to the genre of prose discourse. Prose discourse is a sermon or an epistle, like one of Paul's letters. And as you know studying one of those letters, you have to slow down and pay closer attention to the logical flow of the teaching. Your brain needs you to follow the thought more carefully if it is going to keep up. So for the lessons in this section I'm going to shorten the amount of scripture that we go over each time, so that we can pay more attention verse by verse.

If you do not adjust to the change in genre, you'll just keep reading through these chapters at the same speed that you read narrative and when you are done you will find that you can remember hardly any of it. It just can't stick to the brain. One of the reasons I have kept us moving through the first twelve chapters is so that when we get here we can now slow down and pay attention to this prose discourse, this teaching of Jesus on discipleship.

Along recognizing the genre switch, it helps a lot to recognize the structure of the lesson. Just like our previous two sections of John, this section is structured chiastically. And it is even more important to recognize that this section is chiastic than it has been for the past two; I think with the narrative sections you can get by without noticing that, but in this teaching section it really helps your brain grab hold of it if you understand the order.

After I first becoming familiar with these chapters as a younger believer, I knew this is where Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. So, when I wanted to refer to that or get back to the sending of the Holy Spirit, I'd just flip to John, and I knew it was around John 15 somewhere, I could usually find it, but often it was not exactly the words I was looking for. And I've had this experience more than once. Time would pass, and I'd come back and I thought I knew what the words were and I knew there was a promise around John 15 and I would find it, but they weren't exactly what I expected to find. It was a little off. It literally took me a couple of decades before my brain finally realized Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit twice in these chapters. And I was getting confused, I thought there was one and it was never quite right. They are both near chapter 15, one is in chapter 14 and the other is in chapter 16. And this is the center of our chiastic structure. Chapter 15 is the middle of the whole section.

It's sandwiched right in the center of these two promises of Jesus to send the Holy Spirit and it is the metaphor of the vine and the branches. It also contains Jesus' seventh "I am" statement, "I am" with an object: "I am the true vine." This central metaphor of the vine and the branches with these two flanking promises of the Holy Spirit provides our foundational understanding for what it means to be a disciple of Jesus after he has returned to heaven, how do walk with him now. We need to understand the Holy Spirit and we need to understand this metaphor of the vine and the branches. So that's in the center.

Moving from inside out in our structure, on either side of the promises to send the Holy Spirit, Jesus addresses with emotional terminology the sorrow that is coming on the disciples. And he comforts

them, and he repeats on both sides, in each frame, “Whatever you ask in my name, that I will do.” These two frames are the beginning of chapter 14 and the end of chapter 16.

Moving out one more time, we come to the outer frame of chapters 13 and 17. In these two frames Jesus sanctifies or sets apart his disciples for service. In both, he affirms their belief in him. In chapter 13 he declares them to be clean. And in chapter 17 he declares that they have known him, received him, believed in him. Sanctification in chapter 13 takes place through the washing of their feet. Sanctification in chapter 17 takes place through a prayer that Jesus prays over them.

So that’s our structure: on the outside we have Jesus sanctifying his disciples; then we move in one step, we have Jesus comforting his disciples. Move in one more step, we have Jesus promising to send the Holy Spirit and then right in the center we have the metaphor of the vine and the branches. If we abide in him, we will bear fruit. Our theme for this section is the nature of discipleship, what is true discipleship. The genre is prose discourse so we have to pay a little more careful attention, and the structure is chiasmic. Jesus is going to teach us about discipleship. We begin with a symbolic act of sanctification, the washing of the disciples’ feet. Jesus has three lessons here for us to remember. We start in verses 1-4 with an introduction, and then I will move on to the three lessons.

Introduction to the second half of John (13:1-4)

The introduction, 13:1-4:

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. ² During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon, to betray Him, ³ *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

It begins with this phrase “Now before the Feast”. That’s an indication that this foot washing is happening right before the specific Feast of Passover that we also call the Last Supper. Jesus will be arrested later this night and then he’s going to be crucified. Telling us this, John directs our attention back to the theme of Passover. It started in chapter 1, John the Baptist declared publicly Jesus is the Lamb of God, he’s the Passover lamb. By his atoning death, Jesus will satisfy the wrath of God just as lambs sacrificed 1500 years before symbolically turned away the angel of wrath in Egypt from Israelite homes. Well now, after 1500 years we have arrived at the final Passover. Jesus is the fulfillment. Jesus is the Passover lamb who dies in our place.

Jesus’ own awareness “that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father” motivates what he is about to do next for his disciples. Jesus is preparing to depart. His death will be a brief departure bit’s going to be followed by a much longer departure. He still hasn’t come back yet.

As Jesus faces the cross, his mind and heart are on his disciples - I love this part - “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” He’s still loving them. Loving “to the end” certainly climaxes in the cross, that’s the supreme act of love. He’s going to go all the way through with the plan, he’s going to go through with the cross, he’s going to love us to the end. But “loving to the end” also includes this teaching right now that Jesus is doing for his disciples in these last moments, his heart is for them. And he’s preparing them for what’s getting ready to come. He’s teaching them, loving them all the way to the end.

Then John provides a contrast for us, drawing our attention to Judas and the fact that Satan has already at this point entered into him. And Jesus is still going to wash his feet. Jesus is going to wash the feet of the one who he knows is going to betray him. Jesus loves them. Then when we think about this thief Satan who comes to kill and steal and destroy (10:10), we’re reminded that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He’s the one who’s going to lay down his life for the Sheep. Satan does not care about any of the sheep, he certainly doesn’t care about Judas, not anybody. He is a leader who uses

people for his own agenda, his own plan to overthrow what God is doing. He doesn't care about the followers. Jesus' view of his followers is communicated through what he does next.

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

With the cross looming before him. Jesus turns his thoughts to his disciples, to what they need to hear from him, and what they need to see him do.

You are clean (13:5-11).

The first lesson Jesus has for them, "You are clean." This is verses 5-11.

⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. ⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, *then wash* not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*." ¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

As usual Peter speaks what is in his heart. Others might have been really uncomfortable with what Jesus was doing but Peter says it out loud: you can't do this, Jesus, you can't do this, Lord.

Can you pause your thinking about Peter for a moment and just imagine for yourself what it might be like to have your feet washed by Jesus? It helps to close your eyes. Just imagine yourself leaning back on a couch or in a lounge chair in the yard. Your shoes and socks are off. Jesus himself comes to you and he gently lifts one of your feet over a water basin that he's holding. And he pours soothing water onto your foot. And then he carefully wipes your foot dry with a clean towel. He places that foot down and he gently lifts up your other foot, and he also pours that refreshing water over that foot as well, and wipes it dry.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine Jesus doing that to you?

As I imagine Jesus washing my feet, I realize that I do not quite connect with the experience of the disciples. I don't come from the same culture, I don't come from a foot washing culture. My primary feeling when I imagine Jesus washing my feet is embarrassment that someone would be washing my feet. I would be embarrassed to have anybody touch my feet. I would not enjoy the process. I don't know how it is for you. That is not quite where Peter was emotionally. I think it quite probable that he would like the idea of someone washing his feet. He would be for that. It's a normal custom. They all wore sandals and their feet got dirty. And they reclined on couches with their feet directed out behind them as they were eating. It made sense to wash your feet before eating. But it was a task for someone of lower class or rank to do for someone of higher class or rank. If there was a slave, a servant, they should do it. That's their job. If not, you can imagine the youngest disciple, it falls on him to go around and wash everybody's feet. But never the teacher. That would be shameful.

When I close my eyes and imagine Jesus washing my feet, I am embarrassed to have my feet washed. Peter was offended for Jesus. John the Baptist had proclaimed in relation to Jesus, "I am not worthy to tie his sandals." John communicates he is not worthy to do the job of a slave of Jesus, he's less than a slave. I imagine Peter feels the same, he is not worthy to touch the feet of Jesus. Mary shows similar humility. She does touch his feet but she pours out expensive perfume on him, the best she has, and she's wiping his feet with her hair. These actions are sentiments, they're not shameful because Jesus has such great honor. But to switch it around, to have Jesus take the role of touching Peter's feet, it would be shameful for Peter to allow such a thing to happen. He loves Jesus. He honors Jesus. Jesus is Lord of all. How can Peter stay quiet as though it is right for this to happen, for

Jesus to wash his feet? That's not the way it should be and Peter says it. Peter is embarrassed for Jesus, not for himself.

And so again I close my eyes and imagine Jesus as King of kings, Lord of Creation, worthy of every honor and every act of service. He does not exist to serve me. Jesus exists for me to glorify him. And I say to him, "Lord, this is not right. I am your servant. I am not worthy to wash the feet of the one who ought to be washing your feet."

But he says back to me, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me."

"Oh, then Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." I am not worthy but I love and I want to be with you, and if you're willing and that is the only way, then yes, please, wash me. And that's Peter.

Jesus' words to Peter that he would understand later what is happening points to the cross: after the cross you're going to understand this. By washing the disciples' feet Jesus is taking a humble position of a servant. But in reality Jesus is going to lower himself much further still, this is a symbolic act. Jesus is going to go through a real act of shame and sacrifice on the behalf of his disciples, as Paul writes of Jesus in Philippians 2:7-8,

[He] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is the first lesson of foot washing. Jesus communicates his love to his disciples by modeling the sacrificial act of the cross through which he will make each one truly clean.

If you can imagine Jesus washing your feet, can you imagine him going to the cross for you? This is what he has done. This is how he is able to look you in the eye and declare you do not need to be washed. You are clean.

Confess your sin (Same text)

Our second lesson from the foot washing comes from this same passage, particularly verse 10. Jesus tells Peter, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean." Our first lesson is that you are clean. This is an essential truth of discipleship. If you are his, you are already clean. Discipleship is not a process by which you make yourself clean. That's not what you're doing in following Jesus. If Jesus has died for you, and you have accepted the gift of his sacrifice, you stand in his grace. You are no longer judged under the law. He took the judgment himself so that you might be declared clean. One of the great errors of many Christians is this sense that they must work to attain their own righteousness through a mix of faith and moral behavior and religious ritual, that through that they can somehow make themselves clean. That's every other religion in the world. That is human religion. That is not Christianity. It's not Old Testament and it's not New Testament. Just like Abraham was declared righteous by his faith in Genesis 15:6, you are declared righteous in Jesus Christ. You do not make yourself clean. That's not what discipleship does. Peter does not need to be made clean. Jesus declares: you are already clean, you don't need to wash again.

But what does it mean when he says, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean,"? I believe Jesus is making a reference to confession of sin here. I must admit that in this lesson that's not absolutely clear. Jesus could simply be emphasizing the fact that Peter is already clean, and we should not make a spiritual point out of the need to wash the feet.

Maybe the washing of feet is just part of the metaphor and it doesn't have a spiritual parallel. But I think it does. I think there's a second lesson here in the washing of the feet. You may have heard me refer to the two questions of covenant in my teaching in John or if you've listened to the Romans or the Pentateuch podcast. The first question of covenant has to do with the basis for our relationship with God. This is the question, "What makes me righteous enough to be in relationship with holy God?" And that's the first question we have to ask if we're going to enter into covenant, "How do I

have relationship with him when he's so holy?" There is only one answer to this question from the Christian, Biblical point of view. You are made righteous by grace through faith. Nothing in yourself can make you righteous. Nothing can lift you up to a level of holiness by which you can enter into relationship with God. You can't do it, it's the whole point of the cross. The wages of sin is death. And everybody has sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Your thoughts, words and actions have made you unclean and you can't make yourself clean. The only way to be righteous enough to enter into a relationship with our holy God is to receive from him a righteous standing that you don't really deserve. If you placed your faith in Christ that's what you have. You are 100% clean, 100% forgiven, 100% secure as a gift of grace that you received by faith. He takes the punishment for your sin and declares you clean. This is what it means for Peter to have already been washed. He's already clean because he has believed. Paul says it this way in Titus 3:4-5,

⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

So, the answer to the first question, "What makes me righteous enough to be in relationship with God? What makes me clean enough?" is 100% the gift of grace that comes from Jesus. That's what makes you righteous.

Now, we can ask the second question of covenant which is this, "Now that I am secure in my relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, how then should I live?" The disciple of Jesus does not ask, "How should I live so that I might become acceptable to God or make myself acceptable and clean and lovable?" No! It's, "How shall I live now that I am accepted, now that I am clean? How should I live?" "Having been washed clean, how shall I live?"

This question, "How shall I now live?" is the question of this whole section. As a disciple of Jesus, how shall I live?

And chapters 13-17 address this. So we're going to address different facets as we go on. The question we are addressing right now is how to be washed clean from sin. Peter says, "Jesus wash all of me." Jesus says, "If you have been washed you do not need to bathe again. Just clean your feet."

When you sin as a believer that sin does not now make you unclean. You have been washed clean by Jesus as a legal declaration over you. All your sin, past, present and future is already paid by the cross.

But even though the penalty of sin is completely paid for in full, sin can still have an effect on your life. And we're all aware of this. We know there are consequences to sin. Sin damages us, sin damage people we love. Sin damages random people, people we don't even know. Sin also damages your fellowship with your Heavenly Father. And that's primary, that's the primary effect of sin. No matter what sin it is, somebody's always hurt. It always affects your relationship with your heavenly Father. You are not kicked out of the family when you sin. He does not love you less. He does not reject you. Jesus has said in chapter 6, "Not one of these that my Father has given me am I going to lose but I will raise all of them with me up on the last day." Sin doesn't get you kicked out. But unconfessed sin does build up a wall between you and God that affects your ability to enjoy the fruit of relationship with him.

I love the analogy I was taught as a young believer. Let's say my Dad had a day off, and he planned to go fishing. Thinking it would be nice to spend time together he invited me to go with him. And I said, "Sure Dad, let's do it." The night before I stay out so late with my friends and I only vaguely remember my Dad calling me to get up at four in the morning. I just mumble, "I'm feeling sick. You'll have to go without me." And I feel when I'm saying that and I feel as I'm falling back to sleep. But he goes off. And what do I do when I wake up? I don't really want to face him so I leave the house and go somewhere, anywhere. For the next four days I make sure I am out of the house when he is around, so I do not have to face him. I just want to avoid him and give him time not to think about it. But it's a heavy weight on me and it's just kind of building up in me. Sometimes I blame him. "Why

would he want to get up so early on a day off anyway?" But mostly I blame myself, "What am I doing? I lied. I'm a lousy son. Is it that hard to get up?" And the longer I wait to say anything the worse it gets. This wall of regret builds up in my heart.

Finally, I do get up in time to meet him at breakfast. "Dad, on your day off when you called me to go fishing and I said I was feeling bad, I wasn't. That was not true. I had just stayed out late. I am really sorry for lying to you, I'm sorry for letting you down. I am sorry for the time I missed you. Will you please forgive me?"

He responds, "Son, I am glad you came to me. I could tell that something was bothering you. And yes, I forgive you. In fact, I was pretty sure that's what happened, and I forgave you while I was out fishing." Now, I had been forgiven as a son for days but I wasn't able to experience the fruit of this forgiveness or the blessing of relationship because I was holding on to that sin unconfessed.

This is how it is with God. When we sin as believers, we have already been forgiven through the death of Christ. But we carry that unconfessed sin in our heart and our mind and Satan uses it to accuse us. One, we feel bad for what we did but Satan then just piles it on in our minds, and what kind of a Christian are you that you would do that and you would hold on to it. And it builds up a wall up between us and God. It does not affect the status of our relationship. He never stops loving us or seeing us as son or daughter. But it does affect the ongoing experience of our relationship with Him. We could say it damages our fellowship even while we remain in relationship as his child.

I believe this is the idea Jesus is alluding to here when he says to Peter that he has no need to bathe again, he's really clean. Just wash your feet. When we truly place our faith in Christ, we are washed clean of the penalty of sin. That is a first question issue, how do I get into relationship with God in the first place. Jesus does that for us. But in our ongoing life with God, when we sin, we need to wash our feet. We need to confess that sin to God, to be honest, to call it sin, to recognize that he's already forgiven us, and to move on with him. This is a second question issue. Jesus does not do this for us. If we carry that unconfessed sin, we will feel the effect of it in our relationship with God. This is a responsibility of a disciple, to confess sin whenever we recognize that we have sinned and in this way keep our relationship with God fresh, and honest, and open.

So these first two lessons go together. If you believe, you are clean. That is lesson number one. And if you are clean, it is still important to confess your sin whenever you are aware of it. So that's lesson number two.

The next lesson really goes in a different direction. Jesus wants us to model our attitude as disciples after his own attitude that he's expressing here.

Lead from of a servant's heart in care of one another (13:12-20)

He wants us to lead from a servant's heart in care for one another. This is John 13:12-20.

¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸ I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but *it is* that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' ¹⁹ From now on I am telling you before *it* comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am *He*. ²⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

We are now talking about the attitude of service. Jesus has a position of authority over his disciples. "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am." Jesus is the leader. He does not deny

that. He has the right position of authority. But Jesus was willing to lower himself to serve the needs of his disciples. And Jesus expects them to do the same for one another.

If you have a position of authority and honor, you should not consider yourself as the one who must be served. That's not the point of leadership. The leader who cannot serve with humility is not a Christian leader. It is an attitude that runs contrary to the values of leadership typically ingrained in us through society. It's a lot easier to say, "Yes, yes, servant-leadership" than it is actually to do servant-leadership because we tend to fall back to our old assumptions of how we've been brought up, that a leader deserves to be served.

Being a disciple of Jesus includes a willingness to serve one another just as Jesus is willing to serve. What does that look like? Does Jesus mean that we need to wash one another's feet? Is that what he's saying?

The point is not literal. Jesus is not literally telling his disciples to wash each other's feet. In their culture that might be a way to apply what Jesus is saying. They could rotate foot-washing duties among themselves, so as not to suggest any one person is better than another. They could do that, it doesn't always have to fall on the youngest.

That example reminds me of my Granddaddy Ebert. My family grew up on the same street as our church. So, Grandmother and Granddaddy, they would come to church and then to our home for dinner after the service. And we typically lingered at the table talking, we liked to talk after we ate, especially us kids when we got older. We'd like to sit there and spend time with each other. At some point, though, Granddaddy would just disappear. Before we noticed it he would be in the kitchen and he'd start washing the dishes. Every Sunday, the man at the table who deserved the most honor, not only because of his age and position in the family, but also because of his character, his kindness, his intelligence, he was the man who deserved most honor but every Sunday he was the one who went into the kitchen and washed the dishes.

That's the kind of attitude I believe Jesus is talking about. It is not about foot literal washing. It is about valuing people, and caring for people and being willing to serve people, and not seeing service as something beneath you.

Wash one another's feet does not mean the person who's in the leadership role does all the work. It does not mean the pastor of a church should be the one washing the dishes or mopping the floors. Or the manager of a business should be cleaning up the trash and making all the coffee. Or that parents should always mow the lawn, make the beds and load the dishwasher. The pastor, the manager, the parent shouldn't disdain that kind of work. But that's work that needs to be done for everything to run, but those responsibilities do not necessarily go with the role of pastor, manager or parent.

Consider Jesus' time these past few years with his disciples. Do we see him in those roles? Is he the one washing the dishes? No, that's Martha. Jesus is teaching. They call him teacher because that's primarily what he was doing, he took that on himself as his ministry role. He taught. He did not wash feet. That was not his role. I am reminded also of these disciples later, after Jesus left and the numbers of believers began to grow, when distributing food to widows becomes a problem. The disciples did not stop what they were doing and take on the responsibility of feeding the widows. They required that other leaders be chosen to take that role, so that they could focus on their ministry of teaching the word and prayer. They were called to the role of apostle. So they didn't put aside the role of apostle to care for the needs of the widows. Of course the needs of the widows were important but that's not how they were to serve. That was not how they were to love people.

Jesus is not saying that leaders should spend massive significant amounts of time in support roles because then they're not doing the role of leadership. He is saying that leadership is a service. He is teaching a new perspective that he wants all true disciples to adopt in their view of each other. To quote again from Philippians 2, a few verses earlier, verses 3-5,

³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.

This humble considering others better than yourselves, considering the needs of others with the humility of our mind. Paul says, “this we saw in Jesus, this we are to do.” Jesus does not recognize leadership that places the agenda of the leader over the followers. The followers are the agenda of the leader. Jesus served his followers by leading well and by being concerned for their care, their development and their personal involvement in the mission. The washing of feet is symbolic. Dying on a cross was real. As a leader, Jesus was truly prepared to do what he needed to do, what his role said to do, what the Messiah must do for the good of his followers.

Jesus is teaching his disciples servant-leadership. Just as he communicated in John 10 with the shepherd analogy. The hired help does not really care about the sheep. The Good Shepherd loves his sheep and he seeks their good, and he gives up his rights, even his life, for their blessing. That’s the attitude Jesus is calling leaders, pastors and elders and managers and team leaders and teachers and parents to adopt in their leadership roles. We are shepherds of the people Jesus has given us as followers. The people and the mission are integrated. The good leader cares about both, he sees them both together.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this passage ends with another reference to Judas and another “I am” statement. Jesus wants his disciples to know that he knows one will betray him. They should not be surprised. It is to fulfill Scripture. Jesus says he tells them this prophecy now, so that “when it does occur, you may believe that I am he.” That last phrase “that you may believe that I am he” that’s another place my English Bible has filled in the word “he” which is not present in the Greek. Jesus literally says, “so when it does occur, you may believe I am.” This is the sixth absolute “I am” statement in John. You remember, that means it’s not, “I am the bread of life” or, “I am the light of the world”; it’s just, “I am.” Jesus has seven of each. Jesus continually prepares his disciples to grow in their belief of him as he has revealed himself to be. He knows they do not understand now all that he is saying. But they’re going to remember that he spoke the Word to them. He said, “this is prophecy.” And it’s going to bring them back to Scripture. And the Word is going to help them understand these things, bringing into better and better focus the true nature of Jesus. They believe, but they still have so much to learn.

Jesus points them back to Scripture ahead of time in order to strengthen their belief in who he truly is as the “I am.” Jesus ends this teaching with these words, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” This is an indication that ministry is getting ready to change for the disciples. Just as Jesus was sent from God, soon he will return to his place with the Father and these disciples will be the ones sent out in his name. They will take the memory of Jesus washing their feet with them. And they need to. The three lessons here are critical to following Jesus as his disciple. This is what they needed to know, and this is what you need to know if you want to follow Jesus as a disciple. The three lessons. Let’s end with the three lessons of the foot washing.

- 1) To be a disciple of Jesus, you need to continually remember he has already washed you clean from the moment you first believed. You are clean in his eyes.
- 2) To be a disciple of Jesus, you need to keep your relationship with God fresh by confessing sin as soon as you become aware of it. When you know you have sinned, go to God with it, call your sin - sin, and thank him for forgiving you.
- 3) And to be a disciple of Jesus, you need to have this attitude in yourself that the people are the mission. You are above no one. Everyone is worthy of your respect, love and service, according to the role God has given you to fill. Wash one another’s feet.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 13:1-20. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. Imagine yourself as one of the disciples. Imagine that you had walked this journey with Jesus. Imagine watching him dress as a servant, kneel before you, and take your feet one by one, washing the dust and grime away and then drying your feet with a towel.
3. What feelings and thoughts come to mind imagining Jesus wash your feet?
4. Knowing that Peter came from a different culture where washing feet may not be so unusual, but where honor/shame feelings would affect his feelings about what Jesus was doing, how do you imagine Peter feeling?
5. How does the symbolism of what Jesus has done foreshadow what he is about to do on the cross?
6. Jesus refers to washing the whole body and washing just feet. In verse 10 he declares Peter clean. What do you think about the possibility that Jesus' metaphor refers to both initial faith in Jesus that results in complete cleansing from sin and ongoing confession that deals with the problem of sin in our fellowship with God? Does washing your feet represent ongoing confession to stay fresh in your secure relationship with God? Or is that reading too much into the metaphor?
7. How do you understand Jesus' command to wash one another's feet? What attitude does Jesus model? What attitude is he asking of you in your relationship with other believers?
8. What are two or three examples from your life that you could describe as someone washing your feet?