

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: Extreme and essential servant leadership is action! Before the Passover festivities, Jesus knows His time on earth is almost over, so He takes an opportunity, during the eve of His betrayal and coming crucifixion, to teach a powerful lesson of servanthood and humility. In so doing, He shows what real love is by the fruits of it—humility and service. A lot was going on; two of His most trusted Disciples were going to betray Him, one overtly and one by fright and panic. It seems that the devil was having his day in the playroom with the full temptation and influence, but Jesus realizes what is going on. He knows what His mission is and that His power and authority are assured. He gets up from the table to do what only the lowest of slaves would do. Everyone experienced shock and awe as they watched the Lord Creator of the universe remove His coat, put on an apron, and holding a dirty disgusting bowl used to wash dirty feet before entering the home, He kneeled down to wash His Disciples feet. This caused a reaction of concept for the prideful (like Judas) and wonderment to the devotees. Peter was extremely perplexed over this and exclaimed, *No Lord, do not wash my feet!* But Jesus replied, *you do not understand, but one day you will.* Peter still protested and Jesus said *if you do not allow me to serve, you cannot belong to me.* So, Peter submitted and even asked Jesus to wash his entire body. Jesus explained to everyone that this was not about being cleaned or taking a bath; this was about something far greater and warned that there was one present who was not spiritually clean. Jesus said, *you call me teacher and Lord, and wonder why I did this thing, but I call you to wash each other's feet too. Allow me to be your example and do for others as I have done for you. A servant is not greater than his master nor is the message more important than the one who sent it. You know this; so do as you have been taught and you will be blessed!*

Contexts and Background

In this passage, Jesus gives an example of humble service. The disciples normally served the teacher; here the teacher serves the Disciples. This also alludes to the relationship between Moses and Joshua. When it was Joshua's turn to take over the leadership after Moses had died, he was the leader but still was serving the people and God. Leaders are servants who model servanthood for a greater purpose. A Christian leader must always remember that first and foremost, he or she is a servant of God's who then uses us to serve others! We are never to lord it over others with power and control but rather nurture as a shepherd does, as Christ has modeled to us. A prideful and a "force of will" leader is never from God and should never be in control of His churches

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Time had come / unto the end.* This refers to Jesus' timing of His suffering and sacrifice for our redemption. Also, in context, we see the theme of opportunities and what one would do with them (Isa. 52:12; John 2:4; 7:6; 13:1; 17:1)?
- *Full extent of his love.* The "full extent" is what Jesus was about to show—His sacrifice for our sins! Jesus took on the righteous wrath of God for sin and paid the penalty, sacrificing Himself for us. Jesus not only set the example, but more importantly, also redeemed us. In addition, this refers to the "substitutionary atonement," also known as "propitiation." Christ was the innocent, sacrificial lamb who died for the guilty—for our sins, something which we could not do. The sacrifice of Christ was for us (Isa 53:4-12; Mark 10:45; Rom. 3:21-26; 1Cor. 1:23-25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:15). 1 Pet. 2:18-25!
- *Evening meal / supper.* What we would call dinner was also a time for visiting Rabbis to give instructions and teaching; Jesus follows this cultural setting. This may have been at the Passover right before His betrayal and execution—either the "Last Supper" or a meal prior to it (Matt. 26:26-28; John 12:2).
- *Got up.* Jesus did not forsake or forget His role; rather, He willingly got up to serve, thus taking the

place of a servant, a prequel to His role as Redeemer. Culturally, people were seated by their social rank: a Rabbi would usually have an honored position. For Jesus to get up from that position was an infringement to the social statutes of the times and an insult to any religious leader who may have observed it. This was a gesture of humility that was culturally honored but rarely practiced, especially by people who would be considered *elite*. And who is more elite than God? People then sat or reclined on a pillow or a carpet at a low table with their feet outstretched away from the table and other's view. Feet were considered socially disgusting, as they were often very dirty. Thus, Jesus would circle around the table behind people, which was very socially awkward, almost a taboo or something one of status would never do. This is why Peter objected so. He was not being disrespectful; he was trying to protect Jesus' dignity. Jesus wanted to teach him a grander lesson.

- *Outer clothing / garments.* An outer coat-like garment was removed but not just to keep it clean; it was a gesture of extreme humility. This is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53 regarding the humble, suffering Messiah that Jesus demonstrated—not the warlike messiah that Judas and the people in general wanted.
- *Wash his disciples' feet.* This is the quintessential demonstration of servant ministry! People back then walked everywhere in open toed sandals through dusty and dung-filled roads. However, in the city where Jesus was, the streets would have been kept clean. Even though people then were more careful and pedestrians would use a different side of the road than animals, it was a culturally unmentionable item to wash another person's feet because they were near the dung. Thus, feet were dirty and needed to be cleaned before entering a home. This was commonly done when the person first entered the home. A wash basin and a towel were provided, which Jesus wrapped around His waist, usually something one would either do himself, or else the wife or children of that home. Rich people would have their lowest slave or family member do this. Even the lowest slave would not do this near the dining area; rather it would be done at the threshold of a home before one entered the main living area. This is an act of extreme humility and must have been quite a shock for all to see (Gen. 18:4; 1 Sam. 25:41; Luke 7:44).
- *Do not realize.* Peter was very impulsive and dedicated to Jesus, thus, he did not see the deeper implication of the lesson of servanthood and the foreshadowing of the cross. Jesus was also showing us our need to be cleansed of sin, an act that only He can truly and fully do for us and only by His blood that was shed for us, which Peter would fully realize in time (Acts 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).
- *Understand.* What they were anticipating about the Kingdom and purpose of Jesus was about to drastically change from that of a hopeful warrior or political leader to a suffering Redeemer whom we much more greatly need.
- *No part with me.* Without Christ's grace and work, we have no hope of salvation or ability to do the work He gives us. This is also a call for the temperament of our Lord to be the blueprint for our actions and service (Matt. 20:26-28; Phil. 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2:21).
- *Not just my feet but...* Peter is not just requesting a bath, but a total spiritual cleansing.
- *Clean.* The Disciples would have undergone a ceremonial cleansing prior to the Passover festivities and would have been fairly clean physically and presumably spiritually too, but Jesus said the spiritual cleaning has just begun (John 11:55).
- *He knew.* Jesus, being God and omniscient (all knowing), had command of the situation, yet was obedient to His mission and to His relationship to Judas and his role. This is an example of God's providence as well as human will and responsibility.
- *Lord and Teacher.* Meaning the Mastery and Lordship of Christ. The disciples normally served the teacher; here the teacher serves the Disciples (John 20:28; Acts 13:33-34; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:1-11; Col. 1:15-18; Heb. 1:4-5)!

- *Wash one another's feet.* Meaning “imitation,” as in *do as you have seen me do and as I have instructed you*. This was not to be a foot-washing ordinance; rather, it was an example of humble service. Real, effective leadership, whether meant to lead a person to the faith or to lead a church of the faithful is all about servant leadership. Ministry is not about *what I want*, it is about following Christ's example and as a showcase for others to see and follow (Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:26; John 1:27; 1 Cor. 3 - 4; Eph. 4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3).
- *Example.* Means to show others and influence and shepherd them—not just tell them. Christian leaders are responsible to care for God's people with faithfulness and honor, and never out of harshness or improper motivations (Matt. 23)! Jesus is our archetype and pattern for who we are and what we are to do—all in love and humility. We can trust Christ to lead us, and thus we can lead others in the same manner. This is also a contrast to Judas who was self serving and Jesus who is God and who serves. Jesus was demonstrating what the Disciples must do to participate in and spread the kingdom of God, focusing and developing others for Him by service, example, and humility. Get your direction from and mold yourself after Christ rather than trends, the latest ideas, or what you think will work. Purely and simply, leadership is learned by first being a child and a servant of Christ. Neither an intellectual awareness nor Christian activity means anything without Christ. We must be His to do as He wills; this takes our acceptance of Christ first, then our commitment and continual faith (example: Ezek. 34: 1-10; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18; 21:15-17; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:3; love: Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Thess. 4:9-10; 5:8-13; 1 John 4:7-11; humility: 1 Kings 8:58; Psalm 25; Luke 22:27; Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:8; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:3-5)!
- *No servant is greater than his master.* The word “Servants” referred to slaves or hired workers. They were much like the butlers and maids we have today, except they were usually “owned” by another person. The point here is that even though there were different types of slaves and servants, Jesus is referring to where the authority lies, which is always with the master; the servant exercises his authority through the master's authority as a representative and thus servants are subordinate to him. In context, this is a reminder to never forget who you are—a child bought and redeemed by Christ. Do not take yourself so seriously; instead, take Him seriously (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 6:9; Phil. 2:7-8; Col. 3:11; 4:1).
- *Messenger.* Like a servant, a messenger or an agent is a representative of the one who hired or sent him and their authority is limited to the function or message at hand.
- *Be blessed.* God desires to bestow upon us significant favor and grace! This is a Jewish blessing, and means *the God who blesses us*—to be deeply happy and content because we are enjoying God and His special favor. There is a direct correlation between following Him and receiving His blessedness and contentment, and following ourselves, pride, and evil to be self-destructive and miserable (Deut. 27:11-28:6; Jer. 1:11-12; Ezek. 36:24-27; Mic. 1:10-15; Matt. 5:3-11; John 3; 7:37-39; 1 Peter 1: 3-12).

Devotional Thoughts and Applications

Jesus clearly tells us what a leader is and how one should act and work. It is not about pride or power or control; it is about being a servant. A pastor or a Christian leader must not be in leadership just to command or be in charge for any reason beside *how do I teach and exhibit Christ* and *what is the best way for me to do this?* Leadership must not be to satisfy one's pride or desires, or for personal gain. Rather, we are to point others in His direction by our example. If pointing to Christ is not our goal or purpose, then we are in the wrong position. We must exit the church as fast as possible, drop to our knees, repent, and get right before God before reentering. Leadership is all about Christ, not us or even our vision; it is purely and plainly *how do I glorify and serve*. Just look how our LORD God, Creator and Sustainer did. Jesus *took a towel and washed His disciples' feet*. This can be an act we can simply use for a “Maundy Thursday” service (a reflection before Easter) and never give it much more thought. It is something where we may act more like Judas or Peter, missing its significance and refusing to apply it to our hearts, minds, and mission. If God, Creator of the universe, performed the lowest job in that culture—washing feet—then who am I to think I am better? Jesus is our example; we are never to think too highly

of ourselves or buy into our own propaganda to perform tasks we are called and made for. It is not about mission; rather, it is who the Mission is for and how He has called us to be within it. Our servant attitude is imperative!

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is real love? How is it shown by the fruits of it, like humility and service?
2. How do you feel that the Creator LORD of the universe, Jesus, is exhibiting “meekness?”
3. How do you take in this powerful lesson of servanthood and humility? Why would this cause a reaction of concept?
4. How have you been an example for others as Christ called in this passage—as He has called you?
5. In this passage, how is Jesus a blueprint by which we act and serve as leaders? Why would a Christian insist on relying on his/her self-importance or position?
6. What does it mean to *do as you have been taught and you will be blessed*? How have you been blessed?
7. How can we make sure that our ministry is not about what we want, but rather about following Christ as a showcase for others to see and follow? What can you do to make this happen?
8. How and why is leadership learned from first being a child of God and a servant of Christ? What happens when our direction comes from the latest ideas, or what we think will work?
9. What happens when Christian leaders are first and foremost servants of God who use us to serve others? What happens when we forget?
10. Can you think of examples of prideful leaders? Why are they never from God and never should be in control of His churches? Why would a church want such people? What can and should a church do with prideful leaders? (See what Jesus does in Matthew 23!)
11. What are some examples of servant ministry that you have seen? How did they impact you? What have you done with being an example of humble service?
12. What can you do to make sure your motives are right and not self serving? How does the fact Jesus is the God Who serves matter? How can you better demonstrate what Jesus does?