

John 13:1-17 (NIV)

It was just before the Passover Festival. 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.

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 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.

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

7 Jesus 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!"

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

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.

JESUS THE SERVANT KING (John 13:1-17): Leader's Notes

Summary:

Jesus uses his last moments with his disciples to give them a powerful example of what he came to do: serve them and clean them, even as they prepare to betray him.

Cultural Notes:

As you can imagine, the feet of people who walked barefoot or in sandals all day would have been the dirtiest part of the body. Even today, to have someone else wash our feet offends our sensibilities; that sense would only have been heightened in Jesus' day.

Key Observations:

- The passage is built on the tension of Jesus being “Lord and Teacher” and “Servant” all at once. For him to wash the feet of his disciples was unthinkable; for one who had demonstrated as much goodness and power as Jesus to do something as humiliating as this would have been literally jaw-dropping.
- Peter clearly doesn't know what to do with Jesus' posture. Perhaps he thinks it's a test: “I get it, we're supposed to stop you from washing our feet,” but then overstates the case when he says, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well.”
- Jesus clearly intends this experience as a model for the disciples. They are not greater than him (something they may have questioned when he was washing their feet), and if he does this, they should plan to do it too.

Discussion Questions:

- Imagine being in Peter's shoes during this experience. What are you thinking as Jesus strips down to his undergarments? What might you be thinking as Jesus washes the other disciples' feet, and as he comes to wash yours? Why do you reject him initially? Why do you then go overboard?
- What's difficult about serving others in the way of Jesus? What's difficult about being served in this way?
- Why do you think Jesus washed Judas' feet?
- How would you feel about Jesus if you were in the room and he were washing your feet?

Ideas for Application:

- If trust is high in the group, you could think about actually washing each other's feet as an act of worship.
- Think about someone (or perhaps a group) on campus whom you might be tempted to think is your enemy. How could you serve them in a meaningful way?