

## **John 70 – Sanctification**

**11/30/2025**

### **Scripture 1: (Jn. 13:1-18 ESV)**

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

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

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

## Sermon:

Now that we have reached the thirteenth chapter of John, it is worth pausing to note that the preceding twelve chapters covered approximately three years of Jesus's miraculous public ministry, while the next seven chapters will cover the last three days (actually, it covers only about 48 hours; Wednesday evening's Passover meal to Jesus' removal from the cross, late on Friday afternoon) of Jesus' earthly life, with five of those chapters being

John (Chapter)	Content	Percentage	
1	Prologue, baptism, calling of disciples	4.76%	devoted entirely to Jesus's words and teaching during one evening meal. John has spent more than half his Gospel telling us about three years and will spend another third telling us about three days. Dedicating this much ink to such little time, emphasizes how important this period is and how important these teachings are for us to understand well.
2-12	Three years of ministry, signs and wonders	52.38%	
13-17	The "Upper Room" discourse; Jesus' final teaching to the disciples	23.81%	
18-19	The arrest, trial, and death by crucifixion of Jesus	9.52%	
20-21	The resurrection of Jesus, the restoration of Peter, and final evidences	9.52%	

highlight and keep in mind throughout the next several chapters of this Gospel.

First, the Evangelist begins the "Upper Room Discourse", called such in reference to it being a *kataluma* (Mark 14:14, Luke 22:11): a "guest room" that was used to house family or friends while they traveled and which might have been a room on the upper floor of a resident's home {it is also important to note that the "inn" without room of the nativity narrative was also called a *kataluma*, not a *pandoxeiov* (Luke 10:34): a public inn or lodging place ; with a specific time marker, "*before the Feast of the Passover*". Although John does not specifically state that this happened on the night of the Passover feast, to remain consistent with the Synoptic Gospels and since the narrative leads directly into Jesus's arrest and trial, we know that this teaching took place during the same meal as described in Luke 22:1-38 and Matthew 26:17-35, when Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. So, by Jewish reckoning, we note that a "day" always begins at sundown (per Genesis 1:5), therefore, this discourse and these events must have begun on the evening (the start) of the fourteenth of Nisan (Leviticus 23:5); six days after Jesus' anointing in Bethany (evening of Nisan 8), and just five and a half days after Jesus's Triumphal Entry (morning/mid-day of Nisan 8).

Second, since the Evangelist wants us to remember that Jesus knew everything that what was about to happen, he encourages us by emphasizing that Jesus, "...*having loved his own who were in the world...loved them to the end.*". He reminds us that Jesus has loved them from the beginning of His ministry, that He loved them through His trial and execution, through His death on the cross, and that everything Jesus has done and was about to do, was being done out of His love for them.

Third, the Evangelist also wants us to remember that before, during, and after this meal, "...*the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray [Jesus]...*". But that is not to say that "the devil made Judas do it", he still had the freedom of will to choose his actions. While it was Judas' choice to do what he would do and how he would go about doing it, the inclination of his heart to specifically betray Jesus, was placed there by the devil.

Scripture is very clear that within the heart of the "natural man", of all unregenerate persons, "...*every intention of the thoughts of his heart [is] only evil continually.*" (Gen. 6:5 ESV), and that "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*" (Jer. 17:9 ESV). Meanwhile, John has already shown us that this was according to Judas' nature, that he would be willing to betray Jesus for money "...*because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.*" (Jn. 12:6 ESV).

However, the means by which the devil put the idea into Judas' heart is uncertain and unknowable. It may have been a supernatural inputting, but I think it was more likely to have been through a more ordinary and mundane means: such as by a chance encounter with an agent or representative of the conspiring Jews (Matthew 26:3-5, Mark 11:18, Luke 19:47), someone who just happened to mention that they were looking for “information” about Jesus, prompting Judas to go to them (Matthew 26:14-16, Mark 14:10-11, Luke 22:2-6). Regardless, this upcoming betrayal would be done through Judas' willful choice, in his own responsibility, for his own reasons, and with Jesus' full knowledge, awareness, and understanding.

Fourth, the Evangelist wants us to remember that, at this moment in time particularly, Jesus was “...*knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God...*”. Jesus knew that He held all power, authority, and had the ability to do whatever He wanted, however He wanted. This underscores the fact the Jesus still willingly, intentionally, and with great purpose chose to experience and suffer everything that was going to happen over the next forty-eight hours despite being able to stop it all in an instant. While Jesus “had to do it” according to God's eternal plan, according to His covenant agreement, Jesus also did not “have to do anything” against His will. While Jesus the God-man, surely did not want to suffer and die, He still willed to do so, by loving them (and us) “*to the end.*”.

Despite this narrative being found only here in John's Gospel, the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet is very well known to Christians. Its importance to our Christian practice of faith greatly exceeds the amount of ink dedicated to telling it and there are countless practical applications which may faithfully be drawn from it. Such applications are important, because they help us to put our faith into practice, but we are going to focus more on the specific meaning of this text; a meaning that is foundational for all of those applications.

Then, “*Jesus...rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*”. When you hear that, does something about the story feel wrong to you? It should. This should make us all feel uncomfortable, if we have a high enough view about God. This is not something that we think Jesus should do. It is something neither right nor appropriate for the Son of God to do. It is not something that the King of Creation should be doing. This is not something we want to think that “our Jesus” would or should do, is it? Yet Jesus did. Jesus got up and did the servant work, as King work.

But here it is in Scripture, inerrantly written in black and white by John the Evangelist. If we truly believe that the LORD God, that Jesus is holy and exalted (that He is “high and lifted up”; Isaiah 6) above us, then the thought of Him washing our feet, one of the lowest and most menial things a person can reasonably do, should make us uncomfortable if we have a proper understanding of who we are. The disparity in this should make us uncomfortable, self-conscious even. But, when we understand why Jesus did it, then we should be feeling even more grateful to Him for His grace and mercy.

There are several details and pieces of context that we, as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, need to be reminded of, context that would have implicitly been understood by earlier hearers and readers of this Gospel. Though they were using someone else's “guest room” {*katalumen*} for their Passover meal, Jesus, being the Rabbi, had the role of host and every host was responsible for all aspects of his household's hospitality. The particular element of hospitality which our story is concerned with was the cleanliness and comfort of His guests. The practice of foot-washing was a necessary need because, since most people wore sandals for their footwear (if they wore footwear), their feet and legs would be covered by dirt, dust, mud, or other less pleasant substances from their ordinary daily travels. Therefore, people needed to wash (or to be washed) before they entered someone's home. Water might have been left at the entrance for people to politely use for washing themselves prior to entering, or a servant might be tasked to wash them. Nevertheless, because ensuring provision for this comfortable politeness was a cultural (and practical) requirement of hospitality, and since this provision had apparently been neglected or forgotten for Jesus and His disciples, Jesus rose to the occasion and satisfied this need.

Now there are several things which we may easily interpret from the simple fact of what Jesus did. Rather than complain about something that had not been done, Jesus took it upon Himself and did it, Himself. Rather than ask someone else to do it, Jesus took it upon Himself to do it.

- Jesus showed respect and gratitude to the owner of the “guest room” by choosing to not complain and to be thankful for all that he had already graciously provided.
- Jesus demonstrated His lack of self-importance; demonstrating a blatant disregard for cultural perceptions about social status and social hierarchy.
- Jesus demonstrated that when we should see a need, we should meet that need, if we are able and willing, rather than complain or wait for someone else to do it.
- Jesus demonstrated a physical aspect of His humility: that no job was beneath Him.
- Jesus demonstrated a spiritual aspect of His humility, an aspect Paul describes in Philippians 2, “*who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*” (Phil. 2:6-7 ESV); demonstrating that, despite actually being “better” or “greater” than everyone else, Jesus’s “better-ness” and “greater-ness” mattered to Him less than His love for His disciples.
- Jesus demonstrated that necessary work is never personally demeaning, and that those who do such work are worthy of consideration, even when it may cause a person to sacrifice some small measure of their pride; even “dirty jobs”, like those showcased by Mike Rowe<sup>1</sup>, such as collecting garbage or emptying septic tanks are as valuable, worthwhile, and deserving of respect and honor by others. So, if you ask “What would Jesus do?”, understand that it includes washing feet.

While Jesus was doing this work, “*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”*”. This section of the passage is more challenging and difficult to interpret than we might think. It actually becomes dangerous if we over spiritualize it. But, this exchange between Peter and Jesus is spiritually informative.

First, let us consider the exchange on the physical level.

- Peter expressed his concern about Jesus doing this work, asking, “*Lord, do you wash my feet?*”, and self-assuredly asserting, “*You shall never wash my feet.*”. His complaint revolved around his assumption about the appropriateness of his social superior, his Rabbi, performing such a menial task. Peter did not think that this was something befitting Jesus. Peter did not believe this was something that Jesus should do. What Jesus was doing felt wrong to Peter. Yet, even though he did not think this good for Jesus to do, Peter did not offer or try to replace Jesus in doing it. Or, perhaps Peter objected out of his personal embarrassment. Perhaps he did not want Jesus to see just how dirty his feet were. Sure, he knew that Jesus knew his feet were dirty, but Jesus would not have known just how dirty they were.
- Jesus answered him, “*What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.*”; implying that what Jesus was doing, was meant as a lesson that would soon be explained. But when Peter doubled down on his objection, “*Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share*

1 <https://mikerowe.com/videos/dirty-jobs/>

*with me.*” This caused Peter to realize that it was something far more important than he could imagine, so he “over-corrected” to the opposite extreme by insisting, *“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”*. Peter went from “Don’t wash my feet!” to “Give me a full and complete bath!”. Yet I do not think he intended an argument of *ad absurdum*. I suspect that his blustering was merely an attempt to cover his lack of understanding and comprehension.

- How often do we do something similar, when compensating for our own felt deficiencies?
- Responding to Peter's zealotry, Jesus explained, *“The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”*. While this could have been understood simply as a matter of hygiene, the Evangelist adds further explanation, telling us that *“For [Jesus] knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’* Otherwise, Jesus' retort of, *“If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”*, would be understood simply as a host's concern for the cleanliness of his table, meaning “Unless you are 'sanitary', you may not join in the fellowship of my table.”

Now there are three words in this exchange which we need to pay close attention to, to help us understand both its physical and its spiritual meaning, the Greek words: *nipto*, translated as the verb “to wash”; *louo*, translated as the verb “to bathe”; and, *katharos*, translated as the adjective “be clean”.

- *Nipto* was used to simply describe ordinary washing: soaping, scrubbing, rinsing, and drying; to make something or someone clean. However, it was also used contextually, to describe the ritualistic and ceremonial washing necessary for spiritual (moral) and religious purification.
- *Louo* was ordinarily used to describe the total or full washing of a person, literally in the sense of bathing. It was only later, into our Christian use, that the term received an added metaphorical meaning of “spiritual cleansing”, such as in relation to Christian baptism (a washing which is only made effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit).
- *Katharos* plainly described something in the state of being clean, as in free from dirt or other unwanted soil. However, it was also a commonly used metaphor describing someone considered morally righteous or things which were spiritually pure and undefiled.

Therefore, we may plainly and most simply understand this as a matter of hospitality; of a host providing for the comfort of their guest, emphasizing the great importance of hospitality in Jewish and Christian life, as we are commanded, *“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”* (Heb. 13:2 ESV; in reference to Abram's hospitality to the angels [and the LORD] prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18). Jesus thus elevates the importance of hospitality by His example of humility through the act of sacrificial service, even as an honored host.

Yet Jesus's promise that *“...afterward you will understand.”* prompts us to analyze and consider these things beyond the plainest, or most ordinary meaning. His promise warns us that He is adding a new layer of extraordinary meaning to this ordinary activity. But, it also makes us question whether it is a meaning added to the activity itself or, a meaning added to this incident only. Before we try to answer those questions and understand the spiritual meaning of Jesus washing His disciples' feet, we must first pay attention to Jesus' explanation. *“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.’”*

Jesus explained that He had just set an example for them (and for us); that they/we should do just as He had done to them. He told them that “*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*”, instituting the sacrament of foot-washing, right? No. The Church has never universally accepted foot-washing as a sacramental rite, nor has tradition made it a required practice of the Christian faith. So clearly, the Apostles understood this as being about something other than just foot-washing, otherwise, the whole Church has been in willful disobedience of this command by Christ for two thousand years! Jesus meant this as an example for us to follow, but not as that specifically prescribed practice.

Jesus asked them “*Do you understand what I have done to you?*”, implying that the meaning was greater than the act itself. But, what is that meaning? Jesus told them, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.*”. He described an obvious truth, the truth of hierarchy understood by everyone who is subordinate to another. Obviously, servants are less socially important than their masters, and messengers are less important than the person sending the message. However, the difference or change here is not in what Jesus said, but is found in what Jesus did.

- Jesus, the “*Teacher and Lord*”, having the role “master” in the example showed, by washing the feet of His followers, who had the role of servants, that He did not consider Himself to be greater than them. By His willing condescension, He elevated them until they were social equals.
- But, through Jesus's action, they also each became equally clean, according the plain understanding of *katharos*, though by the Evangelist's stated exception, they were not equally clean spiritually.

Now, we may consider the spiritual sense of the exchange between Peter and Jesus.

- Jesus washed the feet of the disciples, *nipito*. He removed the dust, dirt, and grime which contaminated them; purging them of all the soiling nastiness and restoring them to purity and clean-ness. This is easy for us to spiritually interpret. Obviously, washing the dirt away was representative of Christ's removal of our sin and its spiritual pollution.
- Peter's objection of, “*You shall never wash my feet.*”, spiritually represents our obstinate attempts to reject, refute, and defy the intention and purpose of our mighty King.
- Jesus's answer, “*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*”, emphasizes His active agency and then refocuses us onto the spiritual benefit of our compliant submission; our union with Christ.
- The repeated use of *nipito* reminds us that, just as things cannot wash themselves (we need one hand to wash the other), we need to be washed by another. We cannot wash ourselves. We are reminded that our being cleansed, having our sins washed away through the forgiveness of Christ, only happens if Jesus is the one to wash us. He must sanctify us, in order for us to be sanctified wholly.
- However, the last portion is more challenging to understand rightly, and it has been used to support certain doctrinal errors. After Peter asked Jesus to wash his whole self: his feet, head, and hands; Jesus replied, “*The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.*”. Since ordinarily, bathing is a very personal and individual activity (although in the Hellenized culture “bathing” was a communal practice and a social activity, involving heating [sauna], cooling, washing [more traditional bathing], oiling and “scraping”), we might assume that “bathing” or “having bathed” represents our own works of righteousness, our works of pious devotion, our good works and good faith efforts to please God, while Jesus's “washing” simply completes the work of our being made clean. We might assume, based on this example, that God accepts our righteous efforts and then, that Jesus makes up the difference in any righteousness we lack. But, we could not be more wrong. That idea describes the heresy of Pelagianism which, although it has been condemned by the Church since the 5<sup>th</sup> century,

often reappears. That idea about our salvation relies upon and depends upon one's own self for salvation ultimately, rather than relying entirely upon the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Instead, by the context of the Greek grammar: where *louo* is a perfect, middle, participle; meaning that the bathing action was completed and done to the subject, not by the subject, which makes the King James version of the verse, “*He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.*” (Jn. 13:10 KJG) more correctly clear. This washing by Jesus is more representative of a repetitive washing, the regular removal of accumulated dirt or spiritual pollution.

If we interpret the cleanliness of already “having been bathed” as the washing of regeneration, then this washing becomes representative of the cleansing we enjoy after our regularly needful confession and repentance of our sin; our restoration to righteousness that leads to our assurance of pardon and peace of conscience. This interpretation consistently preserves the sovereignty of God in our election and the uniqueness of Christ's work for our salvation.

So, since this story teaches us about the exemplary humility of self-sacrificial hospitality, and since Jesus willingly condescend to stoop down to our ordinary human status so as to raise us up to His, and since it teaches us about the spiritual cleansing work of Jesus Christ, namely our regeneration and sanctification through the removal of our sin, and since the purpose of that cleansing is so that we may have a “share” in Christ: of being united with and into Jesus Christ, and since the example provided by Jesus was not to literally wash each others' feet, then what does His example teach us and what are we supposed to be doing on account of it?

The example given us in this story, by Jesus, is not so much about physical activity, but the meaning of that activity.

- Loving them, Jesus humbled Himself to serve those who did not deserve His care or consideration.
- Loving them, Jesus washed and cleansed and sanctified them; purifying them by His grace and through His great work of service.
- Loving them, Jesus redeemed them and joined them to Himself.

Therefore, the example which we are given to follow is for us to serve others out of love for them, and to serve them by working to purify and sanctify them, to bring them towards union with Christ.

- We are called to serve those whom we might otherwise consider as somehow “less” than ourselves or, whom we might consider to be unworthy and undeserving of our love.
- We are called especially to serve those whom we might be tempted to call “our enemy”, because remember, even Judas was numbered among those that Jesus washed. Jesus still lovingly washed him while having full knowledge of his imminent betrayal.

Obviously, we are not capable of saving other people ourselves. We cannot remove the stain of sin from their souls. Only Jesus Christ can do that, and only through the effectual power of the Holy Spirit. However, what we are able to do is share Jesus with others, to teach others about Jesus, and to offer them the hope that we have in Jesus and the gracious promises of God. That is the meaning of the example given by Jesus in the story. Now we must apply that meaning to our present lives.

The first kind of service we should do, in following this example of Jesus, is evangelize.

- We need to tell others about Who Jesus is: the Son of God and God the Son; about What Jesus has done: having taken our sins onto Himself and suffering death for them, in our place; and how God the Father proved Him righteous and vindicated Him by raising Jesus up from the dead on the third day, making certain our confident hope in His promise to give us eternal life and justify us before God the Father.

- We need to explain the forgiveness that we have received by faith in Christ Jesus, telling them about the removal of our guilt and shame, and about the peace of conscience we enjoy as we rest in God's love.
- We need to show them the peace and wholeness we have, being reconciled with one another because of our being reconciled to God.
- We need to show them how we now may live a better way: free from needlessly suffering anxiety and unreasonable fears; by trusting God, by relying and depending on Him, and being thankful for all of His good provision, knowing that He does work “...*all things...together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*” (Rom. 8:28 ESV), even things that we do not naturally think are good.

A second kind of service that we should do are loving works of good will and charity.

- We should work to help others, as we are able and willing; whether it is by providing them with a meal, mowing their overgrown lawn, fixing a car, or even driving them to and from the doctor.
- We should work to heal the sick, improve the circumstances of the poor, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the lonely.

A third kind of service that we may and should do is to remain knowledgeable and involved civically.

- We should always seek the good welfare of our city, State, and nation, and to pray on its behalf because in its welfare we find our welfare (Jeremiah 29:7).
- We should work to elect governing authorities who will strive to enforce justice and do what is right and beneficial for those whom they represent and govern, “*For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*” (Rom. 13:3-4 ESV).
- We should support measures that align with biblical morality and oppose those that codify the permission or promotion of things that Scripture names as evil, “*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!*” (Isa. 5:20 ESV).

But that list is not exhaustive because we do not have the time, or opportunity, to consider every possible application or example of sanctifying service that a Christian may engage in. Yet such loving service is the purpose of Jesus' example in this story, as He said, “*If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*” It is not enough that we know and understand this, to be truly blessed, we must respond to the grace of God with action.

As Christians, we should always be working for the betterment of the world and its improvement. We should be working for its transformation and towards its eventual conformity to the Kingdom of God. That is not to say that we have a strong hope for total success, but we will certainly enjoy smaller successes, for a time. We cannot bring about “heaven on earth”, even as we work towards having and praying for God's will to be done “*on earth as it is in heaven*”. We cannot create and we cannot usher in the reign of Christ on earth, only God can do that, and one day He will, when Christ returns with a loud trumpet sound. So, nevertheless, as we work to be sanctified in our lives, let us also be working to sanctify the world around us. For still, this is our Advent Hope, today: Hope for the world, in Christ, through our works of Christian service until His returns and ultimately perfects it. Christ shall return and then, He shall “wash” us and the whole world, making us holy and clean.

**AMEN**