

# Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

John 13: 2-20

About 7:00 pm on Friday evening the fifteenth of Nisan

**DIG:** What do you suppose the atmosphere was like at this meal? What range of feelings did Christ have for His talmidim? How did Jesus show His love for His friends? What was Simon Peter's immediate reaction to being served by Yeshua? Why was it difficult for Kefa to accept Messiah's service? What long-term impact do you think Jesus' actions had on the apostles? Was Judas saved? How do we know? In what ways did the false apostle change over the course of Christ's ministry?

**REFLECT:** When has the humble service of a fellow believer inspired you? What are some of the rewards of serving others? Why is it important for believers to have fellowship with each other? How does it affect you to see people serving God with humility? When have you found it difficult to accept help from a fellow believer? Why? What practical things can you do to serve others?

On the night Yeshua was betrayed, **the Lord** said and did many things. But **He** stayed on message and on task. **He** was about to show **His apostles** how much **He** loved **them** by dying for **them**. But before that, **He** would illustrate how much **He** loved them in a simple, practical, and profound way.

After the first cup of wine, **the hands** were normally **washed**. Usually a mother, daughter or a servant would walk around the perimeter of the table with a large **basin** and jug of **water**. This is the Jewish practice of the *natilat yadaim*, or *the washing of hands*. Each guest, according to the ritual, was to hold their **hands** over **the basin** and the mother, daughter or **servant** would pour **water** over them. The hands would be wiped dry and parsley dipped in vinegar would be passed around. After that, if the ritual was to be followed, **Christ** would break the first piece of unleavened bread on a plate before **Him**.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already entered and prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. He knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God (Yochanan 13:2-3).

But after watching the self-serving display of **His apostles** after drinking the first cup of sanctification, **Jesus** changes the script and taught **them** a lesson without saying a word. Saint Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words." So here, **Yeshua** does something different and takes the roll of a **servant**. Not only a **servant** that would **wash the hands**, but a **servant** who would go the extra mile and **wash the feet** of **His talmidin**; thus, providing a living model of the importance of serving in **Messiah's Kingdom**. **The servant of all (Mark 9:35)** sat up, and instead of holding **His hands** over the basin, **He** stood and took **the basin, the water and the towel** from the startled **servant**.

**The Twelve** were so shocked **they** said nothing. **Accordingly, Christ**, glancing around the room at the surprised faces, **got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist**. **After that, He poured water into a basin, knelt** before one of **the apostles**, unlaced and removed his sandals, then gently lifted his foot, placing it in **the basin and began to wash his feet** in warm water.

Then, in silence, **He removed the towel wrapped around His waist, drying the feet of His amazed talmid**, and moved on to the next and the next (**John 13:4-5**). One by one, one grimy foot after another, **the King of the universe** worked **His way** around the table. **Hands** that shaped the stars now washed away filth. **Fingers** that formed the mountains now massaged toes. And **the One** before whom all nations will one day kneel, knelt before **His talmidim**. **He washed and dried the feet of all twelve apostles, including Judas**. But **Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself becoming obedient to death - even death on the cross (Philippians 2:6-8)**. Hours before **His own death**, **His concern** is singular. **The Lord** wanted **His apostles** to know how much **He** loved **them**. More than removing dirt, **He** removed doubt.<sup>1382</sup>

By this time, **the men** had found **their voices** and, as **they** previously argued for the closest seat to **the Son of righteousness**, now **they** argued just as passionately that it was unbecoming of **their Lord and Master** to kneel before **them** and **wash their feet**.

In today's Seder, following the washing of **the hands or feet** everyone takes a piece of green vegetable. In most cases it is parsley. It is dipped into saltwater, then eaten. The saltwater represents the tears of the Jewish people in Egypt. That is why **the second cup of wine** is called **the Cup of Plagues** and is not mentioned in the Bible. Ten drops are spilled for ten plagues. The drinking of wine is supposed to be a symbol of joy, and there is a Jewish law forbid the rejoicing over the misfortunes of others, even their worst enemies. Therefore,

these ten drops of wine are a sign of morning. The purpose of the particular ceremony is to serve as a reminder. Green is the symbol of spring and spring is a symbol of youth. This is to remind the Jews of when they were a young nation, in the springtime of their nation. **Psalms 113-114** were chanted after **the second cup of wine**. The remainder of the Hallel, **Psalms 115-118**, was chanted after the fourth cup.<sup>1383</sup> The Hallel was a collection of songs sung at the great feasts of Israel - **Passover**, Weeks, and Booths - as well as on other holy days.

Then at last, **He** came to **Simon Peter**, who protested vigorously: **Lord, are you going to wash my feet (Yochanan 13:6)?**" Literally: *Is such a One as You, going to wash the feet of such a one as I?* **Jesus** reassured **His pupil** that the significance of **the washing** - and of the whole evening for that matter - would become clear in time: **You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand**. But **Kefa** protested again saying: **No, You shall never wash my feet**. At first glance, **Peter** appears humble, as if to say, "O Lord, I should be washing **Your** feet instead!" But this was not **his** meaning. This was nothing short of self-pride that refuses to accept grace from another, the kind of pride that will not be vulnerable in front of others. If **Kefa** had dirty **feet**, **he** would take care of **washing them himself!** "No charity needed here, thank you very much!"<sup>1384</sup>

But **Jesus** answered: **Unless I wash you, you have no part with me**. "Then, Lord," **Simon Peter** replied boldly, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well" (**John 13:7-9**)! **Peter** changed his mind. It's as if **he** said, "Well, if that's the case, go ahead and give me **a bath!**" Under normal circumstances this would have brought a smile to **Yeshua's** face, but time was running out and **the Master** had much to teach that night. This was no time for smiling. **Jesus** answered: **Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean (Yochanan 13:10a)**. They all nodded in approval.

The division of Levites on the night watches in the Temple had to be ready at any time to greet the captain of the Temple guard. Not only did they have to be awake, but they had to have previously taken **a bath** and be ready to go to the Hall of Polished Stones where the Sanhedrin met to draw lots for that day's service (see **Ak - The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold**). The principle was that none might go into the Court of the Priests to serve (although they were clean), unless they had taken **a bath**. A subterranean passage, lit on both sides by oil lamps led to the well-appointed rooms where the priests immersed themselves in water. After that, **they** didn't need **to wash** again that day, except for **their** hands and **feet**, which **they** had to do each time they came to serve at the Temple. It was to this, no doubt, why **Yeshua** answered as **He** did.<sup>1385</sup>

By comparison, the washing of the **whole body** takes place at salvation. Because we still have our old sin nature, we still sin, so using the washing analogy, our **feet** get dirty. Therefore, we must continue **to wash** our **feet** by **confessing our sins**. **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:9).**

**And you are clean, though not every one of you.** Now they were confused again. Clearly His words meant that some of **them**, or at least *one* of **them**, was not **clean**. In the washing analogy, to be unclean meant to be apart from **Christ**. **For He knew Judas was going to betray Him, and that was why He said not every one was clean (Yochanan 13:10b-11).** Jesus said **Judas** was not **clean**; for that reason, **Judas** was not saved.

**Judas** is a prime example of a professing believer who fell into absolute apostasy. For three years **he** followed **the Lord** with the other **apostles**. **He** appeared to be one of **them**. Presumably **he** thought of **himself** as a believer, at least at the beginning. It's doubtful that **he** joined **the other apostles** with the intention of turning against **Christ**. But somewhere along the way **he** became greedy for fame, if not for money. Apparently **Judas** initially shared the hope of the messianic Kingdom and likely believed that **Yeshua** was **the Meshiach**. After all, **he** had left everything to follow **the Lord**. **He seemed** to be saved.

Day after day, week after week, month after month, **Judas** was **Christ's** constant companion. **He** saw **the Anointed One's** miracles, heard **His** words, and even participated in **His** ministry. In all that time, no one ever questioned **his** faith. **He** had the same status as **the other apostles**. But except for **the Savior Himself**, who knew the thoughts of **the traitor's** black heart, no one ever suspected that **he** would betray **the Master**.

Yet, while **the others** were growing into **apostles**, **Judas** quietly became a wicked, calculating tool of the Adversary. Whatever **his** character seemed to be at the beginning, **his** faith was not real. And **his** heart gradually hardened so **he** became a false **apostle** who sold **the Son of God** for a fistful of coins. In the end, **he** was so prepared to do the tempter's bidding that the devil himself possessed **him (John 13:27)**.<sup>1386</sup>

**Not every one was clean?** What did that mean? **The apostles** waited for a further explanation of **Jesus' words**. **When Messiah had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes, returned to His place and reclined.** They had all bathed just that morning in Bethany and **Yeshua** knew this. Now **He** had washed their feet yet, at the same time, **He** was insisting that not all of **them** were **clean**. **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** **He** asked them (Yochanan 13:12). They all looked at each other hoping that one

would answer, but **they** all shook **their** heads no. Consequently, **the Good Shepherd** decided that, to make the lesson clear, **He** had to begin by comparing **His** position to **theirs**.

**You call me "Rabbi" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I AM.** The lesson **they** were to learn from this is that **they** were to recognize **Him** as both **Master** and **Lord**. **Now that I, your Lord and Rabbi, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.** If **He** was willing to do this, so should **they** (and so should we). This seemed reasonable - a little foreign, perhaps, but reasonable - **they** nodded gravely. **They** understood, **they** agreed. **For I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.** If **Jesus** was willing to take on the role of a **servant**, how much more should **they** (and we) be able to take on the role of a **servant**? And as **servants** of the **Lord**, **they** could not be greater than **He**, who was not above **washing feet**. **They** hurriedly agreed with **Yeshua**. **Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them (John 13:13-17).** Now **they** ate happily and without restraint, picking pieces of flesh from the bone and wiping their fingers and dipping into the bitter herbs. To understand one's smallness was in itself, insufficient. One had to practice humility, preferably publically, as **He** had done.

The sky was slivered like a concave mirror and the feast of the Pesach was being eaten in every part of the city of David. Yerushalayim was quiet under the stars. Small squads of Roman soldiers ranged the city streets, but their conversation was muffled and there was nothing sufficiently important to alert them. In another part of the City from where **Jesus** reclined, Caiaphas, the high priest, reclined with his father-in-law, the powerful Annas and with his family. Northeast of them in the Upper City, Herod Antipas, the king, lounged in the beautiful palace of the Hasmoneans, ignoring the Jewish practices that he pretended to cherish. To the west of Antipas on edge of the City, Pontius Pilate sat with his wife in the praetorium, for he was one of few procurators permitted to bring his spouse to the provinces. All of them would meet **the King of kings** in a few hours. At the moment, however, none but Caiaphas gave any thought to the meeting or what it would mean.

**Jesus** plainly stated that **He** was not referring to everyone there, but **He** knew it was **Judas** all the time. **He** said: **I AM not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture** - and now **His** voice rose a little as **Yeshua** quoted from **Psalm 41:9: He who shared My bread has turned against Me (John 13:18).** All the eating stopped at once. Did **they** really understand correctly? Each **apostle** had been steeped in the TaNaKh, and to each the old words were as familiar as the lines on **his** mother's face. The words meant that a friend had betrayed **the Savior of sinners**. In

the past year, **the Meshiach** had used the TaNaKh several times to prove that the events of **His** life had been foretold a long time ago. Now **He** was telling **them** that one of **their** own was would betray **Jesus**. **They** had, from time to time, been asked to believe things that were not easy to believe, but, because **their Lord** had asked **them** to believe, **they** had learned to accept **His** words and to lock them in **their** hearts as truth.

But who? **The apostles** felt embarrassed to be caught glancing at one another. Who indeed? **They** looked at one another and looked away. **He** could not mean the plot of the high priest against **His** life. **They** had been aware of that for a while and were terrified at the thought of being in Jerusalem near the home of Caiaphas. But Caiaphas was not the one **who shared bread with Yeshua**.<sup>1387</sup>

**Jesus** was dipping **His** thumb and index finger into the bitter herbs. **He** saw that **the talmidim** were demoralized, and **His** brown eyes became heavy. So **He** said: **I AM telling you now before it happens**, **He** said, almost apologetically, **so that when it does happen you will believe that I AM who I AM. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts Me; and whoever accepts Me accepts the one who sent Me** (John 13:19-20).

What if we serve and no one notices? What if we help and no one cares? What if we offer to serve and are rejected? Welcome to a servant's world. **Messiah** never predicted how the ones served would respond; **He** simply placed **His** actions before us as an example. We pray for alertness and opportunities and the wisdom to respond as **Jesus** would. Meanwhile, we learn to express gratitude to **Yeshua** for **His** immeasurable act of service in going to the cross for us.

**1. Humility is unannounced.** **Christ** didn't rise from the table and boldly announce, "I am now going to demonstrate humility." **He** simply began **washing feet**. Once someone calls attention to his or her deed of service, it has become contaminated with pride (see **Jd - Seven Woes on the Torah-teachers and the Pharisees**).

**2. Humility doesn't discriminate.** **Jesus** didn't ask **His** students to wash **His feet** in return, but to wash the **feet** of one another. Let's face it; most of us would stand in line to wash **the Savior's** feet because **He's worthy!** But how ready are we to wash the feet of another person in the messianic synagogue or church that we don't like very much? This lesson would hit the apostles hard later on when they recalled the **Yeshua** bowed down before Judas to wash his **feet**, right along with **the others**.

**3. Humility is counterintuitive.** Earlier in His ministry, **Christ** flatly stated: **Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all (Mark 9:35).** **Jesus**, as the **King** of the new Kingdom, reduced **Himself** to become the least of humanity, taking on **Himself** the sin of the world . . . **becoming sin**, as it were (**Second Corinthians 5:21**) . . . and then suffering the most humiliating death ever devised by mankind. While no one can match **His** humanity, we are summoned to imitate our **Master**.

**4. Humility is being willing to receive service without embarrassment.** One usually feels embarrassed by deeds of service because he or she perceives the normal "rules" of status or rank have been breached. In **Peter's** mind, only the lesser should serve the greater. **Christ** inverted this worldly norm. The "greatest" in the kingdom of **God** serves and receives such service with no thought of status, worth, or rank.

**5. Humility is not a sign of weakness.** **Yeshua** did not serve **His** **talmidim** because **He** was weak, needed **their** goodwill, desired **their** approval, or wanted **their** loyalty. **Messiah**, none other than **God Himself**, bowed low to serve the people **He** loved. **He** washed those twenty-four **feet** because **they** were dirty and needed washing.

**6. Humility includes serving one another, not just the Lord.** Serving the **Lord** is the greatest delight in the world; serving one another is not always as rewarding. **Messiah** is worthy of our service and easy to love; our fellow soiled and sometimes painfully brothers and sisters, however, are not always lovely and frequently fail to express gratitude. Nevertheless, genuine humility doesn't seek reward other than the joy of service itself.

**7. The joy of humility can only be experienced through humility in action.** Humility comes through doing, not merely talking about it, hearing others talk about it, or seeing others behaving humbly. **Christ** demonstrated humility and then urged **His** **apostles** to follow **His** example.<sup>1388</sup>

*Father, in **Jesus** we see the perfect model of humble service. Help us to be like **Him**. Open our eyes to the needs of others. Help us to follow **Your** Word. Help us to follow in **Christ's** footsteps.<sup>1389</sup>*