

Be a Humble Servant

Introduction

Welcome to this edition of My Thoughts and the third of our eight-week series on “**The Cost of Discipleship**.” In this week’s segment, “Be a Humble Servant,” we will see examples of selfless service by looking at Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and the new commandment of loving one another. We will be using two passages from the Gospel of John. Open your Bible and turn to the Gospel of John 13:12-20 and 33-38.

One of the greatest acts of selfless service is the washing of feet. It started in the Middle East and was a task of proper etiquette only administered by lowly non-Jewish servants. Jesus humbled Himself in the act of washing the feet of the disciples, knowing future betrayal and abandonment was coming.

Intellect, economic, and social advancements can sometimes lead to pride and the belief that some tasks are below our station in life. These attitudes of entitlement are sometimes exhibited by Christians. Jesus sought to challenge His followers to offer humble service to others. Our goal is to encourage believers to follow Jesus’ example of humble, loving service.

Willingness to Serve One Another

According to ancient Jewish sources, the menial task of washing guests’ feet was the work of Gentile servants. The host would be the last person in the room expected to perform such a task (v. 12). The fact that none of Jesus’ disciples volunteered to perform the act of hospitality revealed pride and an unwillingness to serve one another.

He used this event to impress on His disciples a crucial principle of discipleship: the one who wants to be first of all must be the servant of all (Mark 9:35). The disciples desperately needed to grasp this principle, so Jesus asked if they understood what He had done. In John 13:12-20, 33-38, Jesus commands us to be a humble servant.

Passage Text - John 13:12-30, 33-38

¹² So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said, “Do you know what I have done to you?”

¹³ “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.”

¹⁴ “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

¹⁵ “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.”

¹⁶ “Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.”

¹⁷ “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”

¹⁸ “I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scriptures may be fulfilled, He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.”

¹⁹ “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.”

²⁰ “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me, and he who received Me receives Him who sent me.”

³³ “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”

³⁴ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

³⁵ “By this all will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterwards.”

³⁷ Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

³⁸ Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.”

Teach Us About Humility

Using two significant titles in verse 13, Jesus reminded His disciples who He was in relation to them.

- First, He was their teacher. A title is equivalent to the Jewish designation of Rabbi and is expected to give their teacher respect and honor.
- The second title, Lord, refers to a title of respect but also points to a recognition of Jesus’ Deity (John 20:28).

No one would expect Him to take on the role of a slave, yet Jesus did. The One who was worthy of the highest honor emptied Himself to serve others.

Jesus demonstrated humility, which He called His disciples, to adopt the same example and mindset (Philippians 2:3-11). The disciples developed a history of jealousy and arguments about who was the greatest (Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24-26).

Jesus told them to stop the arguments and humbly serve each other as He served them. He explained that His washing of their feet was an example for them to follow. Whenever an act of ministry is needed, we are to be ready to serve.

Illustrations of Relationships

In verse 16, He used two familiar illustrations of relationships: servant to master and messenger to sender. We are to be humble, obedient servants, and bold and faithful messengers. Jesus taught His followers that the holy life is the opposite of what the world counts as success. Those who trust in Jesus follow Him, and humbly do what He taught.

Jesus paused in His address to speak about the false disciple who would betray Him (Jn. 6:64). Judas was an example of those who hear the truth but reject it. His betrayal foreshadowed in Psalm 41:9, where the psalmist described a betrayer among his inner circle. Similarly, Judas had the opportunity to hear and see everything Jesus taught. He went with the other eleven disciples to heal the sick and perform miracles, but he chooses not to believe. He acted on his evil desires, yet in the process, he fulfilled a prophecy of Scripture.

Jesus chose to tell the disciples about His upcoming betrayal before it happened to demonstrate His role as the true Prophet. The fulfillment would then become another reason for the disciples to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came from the Father. All that happened to Jesus was fully known ahead of time. Jesus sacrificed Himself willingly and freely.

We are Called to Represent Jesus

They would be sent out by their Lord, would bear His name, His authority, and His message. In verse 20, Jesus looked ahead to the responses His followers would receive as they shared His message. Those who welcomed the apostles and received the gospel message would be showing their openness to Jesus and the Father.

His statement reminds us that all Christians are to consider themselves on a mission. We are all called to share the gospel, support the work of missions, and disciple others.

The New Commandment

Jesus issued a new commandment as they were to love one another in the way He loved them (v. 34). The heart of the law commanded supreme love for God (Deuteronomy 6:5) and love for one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:18). What was new about Jesus' commandment was the standard, "as I have loved you." He not only gave His followers the example of humble service to emulate,

but He also gave them the bond of unity that would cement their relationship to one another in Him.

How can we describe the love Jesus has for His followers and that we are, therefore, to have for other believers? Such love is unconditional, redemptive, willing to forgive when offended, and be the motivation for every word and action toward other Christians. The service Jesus demonstrated through washing the disciples' feet was not a show; it was a sincere act of ministry motivated by Jesus' love for His disciples.

Jesus said love for one another would be a distinguishing mark of His followers. It is a sobering thought when we consider how much conflict, anger, and division exists among some Christians (James 4:1-3). Jesus established a new community, the church, characterized by love, not hate, and unselfish service, not prideful greed.

Peter's Pledge

Peter questioned Jesus concerning His destination. He could not imagine Jesus going to a place where he could not follow. Jesus assured Peter while the disciples could not follow now, they would one day also come to where He was going. Peter protested Jesus' statement and professed a willingness to die for the Lord Jesus. His boastful promise to die with Christ, if necessary, demonstrated not only an ignorance of the events, but also, the ignorance of his moral weakness.

Jesus challenged Peter's unconditional pledge to die for Him and predicted Peter would deny Him three times before the next morning dawned. Pride gives us a false sense of strength and security. There is irony in this exchange between Jesus and Peter. Peter pledged he would die for Jesus, but his promise was an empty boast. Jesus knew Peter would fail, but He still loved him. We, too, can take comfort knowing when we fail our Savior, He still loves us and desires to restore us to fellowship and service.

Conclusion

However, it is not enough just to know the truth about humility and loving each other. We must put it into practice. James 1:22-27 makes it clear that the blessing comes in the doing of the Word, not the hearing. Even studying this section in John's Gospel can stir us emotionally or enlighten us intellectually; but it cannot bless us spiritually until we do what Jesus told us to do. This is the only way to lasting happiness.

Be sure to keep these lessons in their proper sequence: humbleness, holiness, happiness. Submit to the Father, keep your life clean, and serve others. This is God's formula for true spiritual joy, Amen!

I am Dale Van De Bogart and I fully agree on God's Word!

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