

APRIL 4, 1993

## Following Jesus' Example

There are many people around who would like to be in the position of having someone take care of their every wish, to see to it they want for nothing, and to cater to their whims. You don't find many who are seeking ways to look after others needs with no consideration for their own needs. If there were job openings for king and slave, most people would want to apply for the job of king and hardly anybody would sign up to be slave. You know there are not literally job openings for king and slave; however, there are situations we encounter every day where we make the choice of waiting for someone to serve us or for us to serve others. We either let someone else do the dirty work or we jump in there and do it ourselves. We choose either to be served or to serve. In the last few hours of the earthly ministry of Jesus, He taught about this choice. Of all the things He could have told them, He must have considered this to be very important. The lessons learned about serving are essentials of living the Christian life. The setting Jesus used was the upper room where Jesus and His disciples gathered to eat the Passover meal. It was on this occasion Jesus introduced the New Covenant and the Lord's Supper. Before these significant events took place Jesus turned to the practical realities of how we relate to one another.

There were several significant events leading up to this situation. The disciples sensed something important was about to happen. Jesus had been talking about a new kingdom and the disciples were trying to get into position for the best jobs in the Kingdom. They knew Jesus was going to be king, however, they wanted to be assistant king. You recall that the mother of James and John had requested that her sons sit, one on the right and the other on the left of Jesus. This caused jealousy among the others and they were having discussions among themselves as to who would have the best positions. Jesus had told them they were acting like a bunch of Gentiles and that the greatest was to be the servant of all. That message just didn't get through to them. As they came to eat the Passover meal, they were still bickering. This set the stage for what then happened.

**JOHN 13:1-5** The Passover was the biggest of the Jewish holidays. It celebrated the deliverance of the Children of Israel from the plague that struck down the first-born of every creature in Egypt. According to the word given to Moses, if a lamb was sacrificed and the blood was put on the door of the house, then the death angel would "passover" the house and the first-born would be spared. This sacrificial lamb of the Passover pointed to Jesus Who (as the Lamb of God) would save us from death by His shed blood. This would be the ultimate expression of His love.

Sometimes words fail to convey the message that is needed. Though Jesus had taught the disciples about greatness and servanthood, they were still arguing among themselves. Jesus recognized the problem and set out to do something to drive His message home. He demonstrated "servanthood" to them as He went about washing their feet and in doing so He made a lasting impression on them. John pointed out Jesus did what He did knowing He came from God and was returning to God. You could argue that this knowledge was the very thing that allowed Him to do the lowly task of washing the feet of His followers. Most of us want to avoid the menial tasks in life because we are concerned with what someone else might think. If you know who you are and have a good concept of your worth before God, then it makes no difference what anyone else thinks.

**JOHN 13:6-8** Peter's protest is the outcry of self-sufficient humanity that does not realize something is needed beyond ourselves. Peter would have rather washed the feet of Jesus than to have Jesus wash his feet. We need to see we need what Jesus has done and is still doing for us. In fact, unless we participate in what Jesus has done for us, then we have no part in Him.

**JOHN 13:9-11** After Jesus rebuked Peter, Peter then went overboard with willingness to participate. When Peter suggested Jesus wash more than His feet, Jesus indicated it really wasn't necessary. You see, Peter had already washed in preparation for the supper; however, his feet got dirty in walking to the place where they were going to have supper. We can find spiritual significance in this analogy. When we are saved, then we are made clean and given a new life; however, as we walk about in the world we get some of the world on us and it is necessary we clean up periodically. Jesus demonstrated, in the physical, the cleaning that is needed. Part of our sanctification is "by the washing of water by the word." Daily devotions that get us into the word of God are necessary if we are to keep the world from building up on us.

**JOHN 13:12-17** One of the requirements for pleasing God is humility. The opposite of humility is pride and it is pride that keeps us from doing the lowly tasks (the menial jobs) sometimes required to help others. Jesus set the example and if we really do recognize Him as Lord and Master, we will want to follow His example. If we think we are too good or too important to do something like washing someone's feet, then we are guilty of thinking we are greater than Jesus. He said the servant is not greater than his lord. We all know that is the truth; however, just knowing it is not enough. We need to be about practicing the truth in the everyday situations in which we find ourselves.

After Judas left to betray Jesus, the Lord gave a new commandment to the remaining disciples and it is preserved in John's Gospel so we too can know it. On several occasions people would quiz Jesus about the Old Testament scriptures. They would ask things such as, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus summarized the Law and the Prophets with just two commandments: 1. Love God with your total being, and 2. Love your neighbor as yourself. These tell us the targets and the extent of love; however, there may be variations in the quality of love. It was in this upper room that Jesus define the quality of love that He meant. He said, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." This is a self-sacrificing kind of love. It is love that goes the second mile and turns the other cheek and it is the kind of love that even washes dirty feet. It's the kind of love that doesn't find fault and that doesn't brag, it looks out for others and does not understand the idea of "looking out for number one". It's the kind of love we must show if we are to win the world to Jesus.