

74 – Dusty Feet

John 13: 6-11

It's not enough to start out clean, we must arrive clean. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven, but on a day-to-day basis sins keep happening, and those sins, if left unattended, have the power to erode the very faith that saved us. That's why our life with Jesus must be a daily walk, not a transaction that took place because of a prayer we once prayed or a doctrine we affirmed. Jesus is inviting us into a relationship with Him in which He will teach us how to avoid sin and draw us close to Himself and wash us when we do sin. If we refuse to walk in that relationship and allow our sins to accumulate, unconfessed, we expose ourselves to forces which harden our hearts and quench our faith. Which is why, Jesus, during that final evening with His disciples taught them a lesson they would never forget. He took a long, linen cloth, wrapped it around His waist so that He looked like a household servant, picked up the foot-washing basin found in every home, filled it with water, knelt down at the feet of each disciple, washed the dust off his feet, and dried them on the cloth He was wearing.

That moment was filled with meaning. Jesus was certainly modeling the attitude of humble service. He told His disciples that He was giving them an example. He wanted them to serve each other that same way. But there was a deeper meaning than that. He was teaching them the importance of regularly confessing their sins and coming to Him for cleansing. He was explaining that becoming a disciple isn't the end of a person's struggle with sin. Walking through life as a disciple is like walking the dusty roads of Israel. Just as a person's sandaled feet naturally become covered with dirt and sweat, so a believer's heart becomes affected by the sins we commit. It's impossible to walk through this world and not be soiled by it. There are temptations of the flesh, spiritual assaults and constant pressure from the culture around us. So sins occur, mistakes happen and bad choices are made, and those sins need to be dealt with, not ignored. All sin has a spiritual power attached to it. It's not a neutral force. It always produces "death," which means it always brings some measure of separation from God. Just because a person believes in Jesus Christ does not mean that person is automatically protected from that damage. It wounds believers and unbelievers alike. When a believer sins it affects our relationship with God; it affects our relationship with others; it sours our mood and strips away our confidence before God just as it would an unbeliever, which is why a believer must not allow sins to accumulate. We must bring them to Jesus and let Him wash them away, and we must do that as often as the Word shows us our sin or the Holy Spirit convicts our heart, for as long as we live. Conviction, confession, repentance and freshly laying hold of the cross and resurrection is meant to be a normal part of a believer's life. We become righteous the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ and surrender to His lordship, but that doesn't mean unattended sin won't damage us. It will, and if left unattended long enough it can erode the faith that saved us. That's why Jesus "...rose up from the meal and put His outer cloak [aside]; and taking a linen cloth He wrapped it tightly around Himself... and began to wash the disciples' feet" (literal) (Jn 13:4-5).

Peter's feet (Jn 13:6-11)

• DBS (Fri, Sat)

On that evening Jesus taught His disciples that they needed ongoing cleansing. When Peter initially refused to let Him wash his feet, Jesus said, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (v8). Then He explained that there was a difference between Peter's initial "bath" which was the righteousness he received when he became a believer in Jesus, and Peter's need to have his feet washed from those sins that arise by walking through life. John actually allows us to watch Peter go through that process. After Jesus was arrested Peter vehemently denied knowing Him three times (Jn 18:15-18, 25-27). Fear overcame him and he did the very thing he had promised he would never do (Mt 26:35). Yet Jesus did not abandon Peter. After the resurrection He met with him privately, in what must have been a time of confession and repentance (Lk 24:34; 1Co 15:5), and then on a beach beside the Sea of Galilee He restored him to his proper place. He gave him the opportunity to confess his love for Him three times to replace those three denials (Jn 21:15-17). In effect, Jesus washed Peter's dusty feet, and He wants to wash ours as well.

Our Advocate (1Jn 1:8-2:2)

The idea that we need ongoing cleansing raises some important questions: How is this done? Must we confess every sin or just the ones we know about? What if we miss one? Years later John would write a letter to believers that helps to answer these questions. Listen:

"If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate (parakletos: someone who comes and stands beside us when we call for help) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for [those of] the whole world" (1Jn 1:8-2:2).



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Obviously, John expects believers to continue confessing their sins to God, with the assurance that Jesus will intercede on our behalf and forgive those sins. He says every believer sins, and if we don't think we do we are deceiving ourselves. The proper response when we sin isn't denial; it's to quickly come to Jesus. By calling Jesus our "propitiation" (1Jn 2:2) he is picturing Him as our high priest. The "propitiation" was the blood sprinkled on the "mercy seat" each year on the Day of Atonement. Just as Israel's high priest sprinkled blood on the gold cover on top of the ark of the covenant as a way of asking God to forgive the nation's sins, John says Jesus constantly applies the blood He shed on the cross to our sins. The point is: We must regularly come to Jesus and let Him cleanse us. He knows what is sin and what is not. Our responsibility is to stay humble and honest, to stay sensitive to the Holy Spirit and confess what we know. He does not expect us to confess every, single sin; we don't even recognize many of the sins we commit. But by regularly presenting ourselves to Jesus and reaffirming our faith in Him all our sins are cleansed.

One another

But there's more. Jesus also said this, "If I then, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (v14). When He said that, He was in the upper room with His disciples, so the words "one another" mean disciples washing disciples' feet. On one level that means we are to humbly serve each other as He has served us, but as we've just seen, foot-washing at its deepest level means forgiving and restoring believers when they sin. That's what He was teaching them when He washed their feet. He was saying when they sinned He would clean them, and by telling them to "wash one another's feet" he was telling them to help one another if one of them sinned. That means:

- 1) I must forgive your sins when you sin against me, and you must forgive mine (Mt 18:21-22, 35).
- 2) I must confront you if necessary and help to restore you when you repent, and you must do the same for me. Listen to Paul: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; [each one] looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal 6:1).

On an earlier occasion Jesus described this process in step-by-step detail. Listen:

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private, if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen [to you], take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax-gatherer (Mt 18:15-17).

He instructs us to approach a brother or sister who has sinned in a serious way and has not responded to the Holy Spirit's conviction so as to confess and repent on their own. Clearly, Jesus does not expect us to "mind our own business." Nor does He say, "It doesn't really matter because it's all forgiven anyway." He orders us to "be our brother's keeper" (Ge 4:9), to take the initiative to confront that person respectfully and privately. He says if that person "listens to you," meaning receives correction and repents, "you have won your brother" implying that if the person refuses we might "lose" him or her. What does that mean? I think the parable He taught just before He gave these instructions provides an answer (Mt 18:12-14). He spoke about a shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to search for one who had strayed, and when he found it he rejoiced. Here is His conclusion: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish." That lost sheep surely would have "perished" if it had not been restored to the shepherd. And then Jesus spoke those words about what to do "if you brother sins."

How serious a sin must be before it becomes that dangerous, and how long a person can wait before repenting is a matter only God can answer. Jesus didn't answer those questions, but He did explain what He expects us to do if we see another believer wandering away. We're to go after them, and if they'll allow us, we are to forgive and restore them. We are to "wash their feet" just as He has washed ours.

Conclusion

On that final evening, Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure. In the future He would be spiritually present with them but not physically present as He had been for the past few years. The first topic He addressed was what to do when someone sinned. By washing their feet He showed them that He wanted them to bring those sins to Him whenever they occurred, and He assured them that He would wash them away just as He had washed the dust off their feet.

The second topic He addressed was to teach them to wash one another's dusty feet, especially in the matter of confronting and restoring someone who had sinned. They were to reach out to that person, kindly and privately speak the truth to them, and if and when that person repented they were to help wash away the damage that may have resulted.

The words He spoke that evening were not meant only for the twelve men gathered in that upper room, they were meant for all of us who've chosen to be His disciples: for all of us who love Him and call Him our Lord. We too, must let Him "wash our dusty feet," and then we too must turn around and wash one another's feet.

Questions

- 1) What does it feel like when the Holy Spirit convicts you of a sin? Have you felt that conviction recently? How did you respond?
- 2) Have you ever had to confront another believer about their attitude or behavior? Without using names, what happened? Has anyone ever confronted you about an attitude or behavior? Did it help you?