



Digging Deeper

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Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

By Kasey Moffett

Why did Jesus get up from supper to wash the disciples' feet? If I'm being honest, I think I would have previously explained that He was being an example for us on servant leadership. We often see this ceremony repeated at weddings between a bride and groom. It is sometimes used as an illustration for running a successful business. As Christians, we talk about Christ being the head of the church as a servant-leader. And that all would be partially true. In fact, Jesus does give the disciples practical instructions to repeat this practice and heart posture (John 13:14-17). However, I think if we only see the foot-washing story as a practical application for relationships and business, we have missed an essential attribute of God: His righteousness.

In verses 3-4, John pulls back the curtain on Jesus's motives: "Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God. So he got up from supper..."

It doesn't say that there was no other servant to wash the feet and that is why he got up from supper. It doesn't say that the disciples were arguing about who should smell the stinky sandals, so in exasperation, he got up from supper. Rather, Jesus was meditating on Calvary, so he got up from supper.

Through washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus metaphorically showed what the cross was about to accomplish for us: He imparts His cleansing righteousness to the filthiest parts of us.

When our thought life disparages our best friend in moments of judgment or our tongues cut at our spouse's vulnerability. When our deepest sin and shame bubble to the surface of our consciousness. Past, present, and future, Jesus stoops down. Dirty water washes over a heart of stone to reveal a heart of clean flesh.

Peter was tempted in the same way we are often tempted (vv.6-9). "Jesus, I need you for some things, but this right here? I got it. I can handle it on my own." Jesus doesn't commend Peter for his self-sufficiency or pat him on the back for his resilience. He gently but firmly corrects him, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me" (v.8).

Let us daily examine our lives to uncover where we are still hoarding idols in the shadowy, cobwebbed corners of our heart. But when we fail, let us be like King David, a man after God's own heart, who repented of adultery and murder and understood his need for forgiveness:

Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

—Psalm 51:7

We rest in the promise that You will love us to the very end.

