

# Jesus Washed Feet

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| SPEAKER  | Matt Ryniker                              |
| DATE     | Sunday, January 26, 2025                  |
| PASSAGES | John 13; Matthew 6; Leviticus 8; Exodus 3 |
| MESSAGE  | Begins at 1:00:50 in the service          |

## THE BIG IDEA

Jesus knew he had come from God, was going back to God, and had been given all things — and with that as the context, he took off his outer garments, tied a towel around his waist, and did the filthiest chore in the house for the men at his table, the traitor included. He then said plainly that it was an example. Which means the question is not whether we will honor it in a ceremony, but whether we will do the actual chore.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ John 13:1 says Jesus “loved them to the end” — not only at the cross, but in the way he spoke to them, organized his relationships with them, and served them the whole time.
- ◆ This was a real chore with real dirt, not a symbolic gesture. Matt was blunt about it: Jesus “wasn’t just kind of Febrezing them.”
- ◆ There is no precedent for it. Peter’s objection was not squeamishness about a familiar ritual — it was shock at something no rabbi had ever done.
- ◆ Jesus has no modes. He was not God on Mondays and a servant on Tuesdays; the washing and the miracles and the death were all God made man.
- ◆ Because our Master did the lowliest thing, no task in the body of Christ can be beneath any of us.
- ◆ “Servant leadership” collapses into something ugly when it means *I’m the leadership, you do the serving* — in a church or in a home. Everyone can feel that it is wrong.
- ◆ The real danger is not ceremony, which has its place. It is keeping the outward form of a Christian action after the core has been gutted — in prayer, in giving, in gathering, in worship.

- ◆ You can come to Jesus with your best and your worst, because he is gentle and lowly. What he will not take is a shell.

► 1:04:53

We are still reading through the Gospel according to John — not in order, but hitting the highlights. Matt commended the whole book anyway: it is short enough to read on your own, and there are chapters we may never reach on a Sunday. This week is John 13, the conversation with the disciples just before the betrayal, picking up where last week left off.

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## 1. He knew exactly who he was, and he picked up a towel

► 1:05:55

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

JOHN 13:1 ↗

We see his love in the incarnation, in the death, in the resurrection. But this verse points somewhere else — at the way he had been living with them all along, the way he spoke to them and arranged his life around them. He loved them to the end.

► 1:06:34

Then verse 2, and the staging is deliberate. The devil has already put betrayal into Judas’s heart. Jesus knows the Father has given all things into his hands, that he came from God and is going back to God. Matt walked the room through the weight of that — God from God, light from light, begotten not made, of one being with the Father, the one through whom all things were made. And with all of that as context, he rises from supper, lays aside his outer garments, and ties a towel around his waist.

“Our Creator God dressed to serve his disciples — including the traitor.”

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## 2. Peter’s objection was the right instinct

► 1:08:19

Matt reached back to [Leviticus 8](#), where Moses installs Aaron and his sons as priests and washes and dresses them in front of everyone. The same Aaron, he noted, who had led the golden calf incident —

“mistakes were made.” The parallel is a man who knows exactly how unworthy he is being honored by someone who is in every way his superior.

The disciples had seen the signs and wonders. They knew his character was not what his opponents claimed when they asked whether he was a Samaritan with a demon. They knew his strength and they knew their own weakness. So when Peter says “Lord, do you wash my feet?” it is not false modesty. Nothing in the record suggests rabbis did this. It was not a familiar rite Peter could accept as a formality. It felt inappropriate and wrong.

► 1:10:20

“Jesus answered him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.’ Peter said to him, ‘You shall never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.’”

JOHN 13:7-8 ↗

Peter swings straight to the other extreme — hands and head too. But his hands were fine, and Jesus says so: the one who has bathed needs only his feet washed (John 13:10). The word *clean* is doing two jobs in one breath. With Peter it is literal. With “not every one of you” it is about a heart, and John tells us why — Jesus knew who would betray him.

► 1:12:07

And the literal part is worth sitting with, because reclining at a table means one man’s feet end up near another man’s head. Somebody had stepped in wet trash, or a chamber pot dump, or what a sheep left behind. At minimum it was warm and they were sweaty. “If you’re going to eat a meal, the last thing you want is somebody’s gross toes next to your nose,” Matt said. That is the context. He actually got water. He actually got a towel.

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### 3. “I have given you an example”

► 1:13:33

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”

JOHN 13:14-15 ↗

Not a ceremony — there was no such ceremony yet. An embarrassing errand, the kind a lowly servant did, or that a host skipped by simply handing guests a basin. Which is why the example binds: there is no task in the body that any of us can call beneath us. A servant is not greater than his master, and blessed are you if you do these things ([John 13:16–17](#)).

► [1:17:41](#)

Then a detail Matt flagged as personal interest. In [John 13:19](#), “you may believe that I am he” is, in the Greek, simply *that I am* — one of John’s quiet reminders, dropped in because Jesus really said it. In [Exodus 3:14](#), Moses asks for a name and gets “I AM WHO I AM.” So the reminder of glory arrives at the exact moment of the lowest service.

*“He doesn’t have modes — like Mondays are Jesus’s God days, Tuesdays are his servant days, Wednesdays he takes off. Everything Jesus did was as God made man.”*

► [1:19:41](#)

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

JOHN 13:34–35 ↗

And we know what that love looks like, because he showed us: touching lepers, letting little children come to him, healing the sick, washing feet, dying for us.

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## 4. The ceremony and the chore are not the same thing

► [1:20:51](#)

Matt was careful here, and said so more than once: he is not making fun of foot washing services, and there is a time and a place for ceremony. But a ceremony can drift out of sync with the event it honors. The original was shocking and unprecedented; ours is expected — it even turned up in a Super Bowl ad. The original was useful; a modern service is not, because he already washes his own feet, wears socks, and lives in air conditioning. The original served the recipient; in a service he half suspects he is the one doing the favor by letting someone else do the thing they wanted to do.

► [1:24:17](#)

So he offered a better test. What actual demeaning chore would you pay someone else to do because you would rather not do it — and can you picture Jesus doing that one for you? The last thing most of us

want is the boss showing up to help clean out the garage. That is where Peter's objection stops being ancient.

And the failure he named is not ceremony but hypocrisy: a pastor who holds a foot washing, tells everyone how much it makes us like Jesus, and then refuses to do the dishes at the reception afterward. "That would be literally a concept attainment failure."

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## 5. Servant leadership that has gone ugly

► 1:26:42

From there to Philippians 2:3 — nothing from selfish ambition, but in humility count others more significant — and then to Jesus on the rulers of the Gentiles:

"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

MARK 10:43-45 ↗

Wanting to lead is not the problem; God may call you to it. The problem is the version where "servant leadership" means *I'm the leadership, you do the serving*. Matt said you can feel that it is wrong when you see it — your discernment tells you. It is ugly in church leadership and ugly in every other kind.

► 1:28:24

He took the same knife to male headship in the home, which he granted has real scriptural support and then turned obscene when it becomes the wife cooks everything and the husband swoops in for the photo op of carving, while diapers and dishes are beneath him. When Paul writes about the household in Ephesians 5:31-32 he says outright that it is a picture of Christ and the church. Husbands are cast as Jesus in that play. Take the shell of the role without its core and the result is bizarre. How did Jesus lead? Interceding, blessing children nobody counted as important, touching lepers, speaking to outcasts, befriending the lowly, washing feet.

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## 6. The shell with nothing alive inside it

► 1:29:56

The rest of the message was a short catalogue of the same failure in other rooms. Prayer, where [Matthew 6:5](#) warns about people who love to be seen praying — though Matt admitted he cannot judge

that from the outside, since some people really do talk that way at home. “The cool thing about prayer is not how cool we look or sound. It’s that we get to talk to the living God — and perhaps even cooler, that he actually cares to listen.” Generosity that looks like giving without helping anyone. Attending church as a box to tick, which he pointed out the Bible never actually commands; what it says is not to neglect meeting together, and those are different concepts. Passive attendance and long-term TV church both count as the imitation version of a real thing.

And worship, which is where he was headed: it is possible to do all the actions of worship without adoring the living God for who he actually is. He named that as the thing he least wants in his own life.

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## 7. Come with the whole thing

► 1:32:57

The close came back to the towel. This is the God we have — the Son in the flesh, washing gross feet — and he is gentle and lowly, with a light burden, so you can bring him what you are carrying. A friend’s line stuck with Matt: Jesus doesn’t want your best, he wants everything.

► 1:34:37

“You can give him your best. You can also give him your worst — the embarrassing stuff, the stuff you don’t want to divulge to anyone but probably should, or just the neutral but kind of dumb stuff.” The one thing that will not do is a performative approach, words with nothing behind them. Come in real life, as your real self. There is no life anywhere else anyway.

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**FOR FURTHER STUDY****SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- John 13:1
- Leviticus 8
- John 8:48
- John 13:7–8
- John 13:10
- John 13:14–15
- John 13:16–17
- John 13:19
- Exodus 3:14
- John 13:34–35
- Philippians 2:3
- Mark 10:43–45
- Ephesians 5:31–32
- Matthew 6:5
- Hebrews 10:25
- Matthew 11:29–30

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**FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP**

1. Peter could not stand to be served by Jesus. Where does being served — by God or by anyone — still make you uncomfortable, and what is under that?
2. Matt asked what demeaning chore you would pay someone else to do. Name yours, and picture Jesus doing it for you. What does that stir up?
3. Where have you seen “servant leadership” turn into I’m the leadership, you do the serving — and how did you know it was wrong?
4. Which part of your Christian life is most at risk of being a shell right now: prayer, giving, gathering, or worship? What would put something living back inside it?
5. What is the one thing you have been holding back from Jesus — the embarrassing thing, or the merely dumb thing — and what would it take to bring it to him this week?

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#### ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

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#### Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G4OjJmhik&t=3650s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.