

INTRODUCTION

Hand gesturing is a common way to express ourselves. We shake people's hand to show friendliness. In the sports world you use both hands to make a "T" to signal time-out. Military officers raise their hands above the forehead to salute to people of higher ranks. Chinese people understand that when another person pour you a cup of tea you should use two fingers or knuckles to tap on the table to say thanks. Many of you know the origin of this tradition. But in case you don't, here is what I learned. Once the Qing Dynasty Emperor Qian Long left the palace and went to one of the southern provinces. To conceal his true identity the King put on plain clothes. He and two eunuchs rested at a tea shop. Qian Long saw a tea master performing a show. The expert put three cups on a table, he then quickly filled all of them with tea from a special-made teapot that had a long stem. He did so from a distance without spilling one drop. The King was amazed. He politely asked the master if he could try the trick. The king repeated the same process and poured out three cups of tea – one for himself and the other two for the eunuchs. That created an awkward moment. How could the two servants allow His Majesty to serve them tea? If they bowed before the Emperor for his kindness then people would immediately know who he was. One smart eunuch figured out an alternative way to pay tribute to the King. He used two knuckles to knock on the table as a symbol for kneeling down. That is how the tradition began. So what should you do if you want people to treat you like a king? Serve them some tea! It is customary to serve senior people, whether they are older or in a higher position. The same is true in the Biblical culture. But in John chapter 13 Jesus broke the paradigm. The King of kings and Master of all served His disciples by washing their feet. They were eating the Last Supper. That was the final private moment Jesus shared with His disciples before He went to the cross. It was also the last opportunity to give out any final instructions. Besides giving a lecture Jesus did a show-and-tell. We shall learn from this story that for our sake Jesus was willing to become a servant of all. Based on this passage we will focus on three words – love, save and serve.

EXPLANATION

1. 關愛 Love

Jesus washed the disciples' feet to demonstrate His love for them. **Verse 1** reads: It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Jesus understood that He would leave the disciples soon. He loved His disciples so much that He used His own hands to wash their feet. Many of us have fond memories of our parents' love when we were kids. It can be as simple as a gentle touch. My dad is a traditional fatherly figure. He worked hard to provide for our family. That was the way he expressed love. But my mom was not shy to show her love through words and actions. One time I was shaving off potato skin to help prepare dinner. It was hot in the summer and so I took my shirt off. Mom walked by and slid her hand over my back. I was like: "Ewe!" But immediately I knew that it was a touch of love from her. Gradually, I learned from my mom. I hug and touch my boys all

the time. I told them that even when I live to 100 years old I will continue to kiss them. As my older son gets into his teenage years he does not like it. He constantly warns me: “Don’t touch me!” He would rather see my hand giving him cash. When being used in an appropriate way our hands can send signals of love and encouragement. For example, when I visit elderly patients I like to hold their hands when I pray with them. They feel loved and accepted. Jesus washed the disciples’ feet to demonstrate that He loved them. **Verses 2 to 3** are quite shocking to me: 2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. If I were Jesus and I knew what Judas planned to do and if I had mighty power then I would get rid of Judas. That was not what Jesus did. Check out **verses 4 to 5**: 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. Jesus got up and washed the disciples’ feet. That included Judas’ feet! At that time people wore sandals. The roads were unpaved. Therefore, every time when guests were invited for a meal the host would assign a servant to wash their feet. This humble job was often done by the lowest servant. On that night there was no servant to serve Jesus and His disciples. Jesus shocked the disciples by taking up the duty. But how could Jesus serve even the traitor who would betray Him in a matter of hours? Jesus loved His own people to the end, even those who did not choose to love Him back. That is the love of God. Paul stated in **Romans 5:8** - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Jesus died for us even when we are rebellious and do not know Him, let alone do anything in exchange for His love! We live in a world where I scratch your back and you scratch mine. But Jesus calls us to love even our enemies. Who are your enemies? It can be those who do not treat you nicely because of what you believe. It can be your colleagues or classmates who call you names. It can be your next-door neighbor who ridicules you for celebrating Christmas instead of Halloween. It can be your family members, even your spouse, who reject your faith. How should you deal with these people? Jesus’ answer is simple: serve them the best you can. Love them the way Jesus loves you. This world thinks that it is reasonable to retaliate to those who mistreat you. You are considered a noble person if you walk away and ignore the offense. But if you choose to love those who hate you then people will realize that such love is not from this world.

2. 拯救 Save

The second word we can learn from this passage is “save.” Jesus used foot washing to illustrate His salvation. Every disciple was too stunned to say a word. Everyone except Peter. He found it unacceptable to let his Master wash his feet. Jesus responded in **verse 7**: ...“You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” The disciples knew that Jesus was showing them an example of a humble servant. But they could not comprehend the full meaning beyond that. It was not until after Jesus rose from the dead then the disciples finally connected all the dots. They then fully understood who Jesus was and all His teaching. At this point Jesus only gave them a hint. He continued His conversation with Peter in **verse 8**: ...“Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” By washing the disciples’ feet Jesus indicated that they belonged to Him. In plain terms, they were saved by Jesus. Jesus used water to represent His blood. A person can only be saved if his/her sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus. Now, all of you quick thinkers may ask: “What about Judas? Didn’t Jesus also wash Judas’ feet? Was he saved too?”

Judas was not saved because he rejected Jesus completely. We can get a clue from Jesus' own words in **verses 10 to 11**: 10 ...“And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. If we interpret “clean” as those who have an eternal relationship with Jesus then Judas was not saved. Time does not allow us to get into a theological debate about Judas' spiritual status. However, I would love to discuss with you any time if you still have question in mind. Suffice to say, it is sad to see a person like Judas who was so close to Jesus but was not saved eventually. There are in fact many “Judas” like that in every church. They do everything any Christian does – attend church meetings, serve in ministries, offer money and the rest. But they do not have an eternal relationship with the Lord. We should not make judgment on any person and conclude this is a Christian and that one is not. Rather, we should examine our own heart and ask a fundamental question if Jesus is the Master of our life. Someone put it well: “If Jesus is not the Lord of all, then He is not our Lord at all.” Now, let us go back to the first half of **verse 10** and explore another aspect of our spiritual life: Jesus said: ...“A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet”... Jesus was responding Peter's request. Peter thought that if the washing of feet was a symbol of relationship with Jesus then he would like to get a full package. Therefore, Peter asked the Lord to wash his hands and head as well. Jesus pointed to a common practice in those days. When a person was invited to a meal he would take a bath at home before going out. But since his feet would be covered with dust from the walking they had to be washed again before entering the host's home. Jesus was saying that a person who is saved has been cleansed of his/her sins. However, since a believer will still sin, there needs to be continual confession. That is where a promise like **1 John 1:9** comes in handy: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. The same apostle John was writing to Christians. Therefore, this confession is not about receiving salvation. It is about the removal of our guilt so that there would not be anything affecting our relationship with the Lord. Just think in terms of the relationship between parents and their children. There is nothing children can do to cut them off from their parents. However, disobedience will grief the hearts of fathers and mothers. A rebellious child needs to admit the wrongdoing and asks for forgiveness in order to restore a harmonious relationship in the family.

3. 服事 Serve

Let us do a quick review of what we have learned so far. The first word we mentioned was “love” and the second one was “save.” The next word we will look at is “serve.” In **verses 14 and 15** Jesus told His disciples why He served them by washing their feet: “14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” By definition, a disciple is someone who follows what the teacher says. But Jesus did not just give out instructions, He did it for His disciples. Not too long ago the disciples were debating who was the greatest among them. Jesus seized the opportunity to teach them the principle of serving others. In **Mark 10:43 to 44** Jesus said – 43 “...Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.” Jesus did not ask the disciples to do what He was unwilling to do first. Washing feet did not need any supernatural power. It did not require extra capability, but humility. In your life circumstances you may meet a coach or mentor who encourages you to try a new approach or just try harder. You grumble in your heart: “Yeah, right! Talk is easy. Why don't you try it yourself?” When we picture a good leader we can think

of qualities like vision-oriented, effective communication, management skills, and so on. Jesus adds one more to the list – humility to serve others. While service is a spiritual gift listed in the Bible you do not need that gift before you can serve others. It is like when God asks every believer to share the gospel with others, but there are some Christians who can do it more effectively. Ultimately, serving is a heart issue, not a hand issue. The question is: are we willing to lend a hand when seeing someone in need? Once in my former church we invited a guest speaker for an evangelistic event. Many people came. Back then I was still studying in the seminary. I was the song leader in that particular evening. So I wore dress shirt and tie. After the meeting we served refreshment in the fellowship hall. A toddler was sitting with his mom. All of a sudden the kid threw up. Naturally, the mom used napkins to clean up her child. But what about the mess on the floor? People around that lady were chatting as usual. I went to the kitchen to grab some supply and did the cleanup. There was nothing earth-shattering about it. I just did what the mom expected others to do for her. There are certain work that you may be unwilling to do. But will you do it out of your love for Jesus, or to show the love of Jesus to others? Notice that Jesus did not ask us to wash others' feet. Some churches observe the so-called Holy Thursday before Easter. Church leaders wash people's feet. Even the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church does it! What Jesus asked us to do is to follow His example to serve others like a servant. So don't start a new denomination and name it "The Church of the Feet-Washers." I do not need you to wash my feet. But you are welcome to wash my car or dishes. You may be a supervisor at work. You may have an army of employees under your management. But in Christ, we are brothers and sisters. In the church, some people may choose to serve in more visible roles – on the podium or in the classroom. We need that. But can we find more people who have a heart to serve in the nursery, serve in the kitchen, clean the bathrooms or maintain our facilities? Besides ministry duties there are brothers and sisters who need special attention. They may be patients with chronic diseases who are too weak to come to church meetings. Some elderly people live by themselves. They need someone to talk to and people to drive them around to run errands. Are you willing to share your time with them? No matter what ministry it is ask God to give you attentive eyes, a servant's heart and the love of Christ to serve others.

CONCLUSION

For our sake Jesus was willing to become a servant of all. A servant has no choice but to serve his master. But Jesus had a choice. This King of king and Lord of lords willingly came into our world to serve like a servant. Let me conclude with a story. Jose Andres is a celebrity chef. He and his business partner open many restaurants in cities like Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Miami. His customers include many of the rich and famous. Andres won many awards for his cooking, he wrote recipe books and appeared on TV cooking shows. But Andres also serves people in a very different way. He established a non-profit organization, World Central Kitchen, in 2011 in response to the Haiti earthquake. In September of this year hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico. Almost everyone on this island nation lost electricity and clean water supply. Andres did what he did the best – he cooked for people. With the help of donation, food suppliers and volunteers World Central Kitchen was able to distribute millions of hot meals to the local people. People borrowed the same model to help victims when hurricanes hit Houston and Florida. This businessman was willing to use his money, time and talent to serve the needy. But Jesus gave it all for you and for me. The same night after Jesus washed the disciples' feet He was captured by

the religious leaders. On the next day He was nailed to the cross. Jesus called us to follow His example to serve others. He promised us that we will be blessed if we do so.