**Behold the Lord Who Washed Our Feet**

Sermon preached by Jonathan Huang on John 13:1-15

On Sunday, November 15th, 2020

1. **Introduction**
   1. You know with this current pandemic, one of the most fascinating things I’ve learned about the coronavirus is all the different ways it can show up in different people.
   2. Now some get infected and have absolutely *no* symptoms at all.
   3. Some get cold symptoms. Others get flu-like symptoms. And then there are others who get so sick that they have to be rushed to the hospital and placed on oxygen or on a ventilator to help them breathe.
   4. Now with the flu season this year, one of the big challenges facing doctors is this: how do you figure out if someone has the flu or COVID-19?
   5. It’s an extremely difficult question because the two viruses can show up in pretty much the exact same ways.
   6. Most of the time, if it’s a close call, it’s probably best to just go ahead and test for both to find out which one you have.
   7. But there’s at least one thing that, if it shows up, you can be reasonably assured that you’re probably dealing with the coronavirus instead of the seasonal flu.
   8. Can you guess what that is?
   9. It’s the loss of smell or taste.
   10. If you lose any of these two senses, there’s a good chance that what you’ve got is a case of COVID-19 instead of the flu.
   11. Now I’m going to venture to guess that most of you have never lost either of these two senses.
   12. But imagine with me for a moment that you’ve lost your sense of smell. For those of you coffee lovers out there, imagine waking up to brew your cup of freshly ground coffee. But then all you can smell when you bring that warm cup of coffee up to your nose is…well, *nothing*.
   13. Or imagine that you’ve lost your sense of taste. And as you bite into your favorite breakfast taco or your syrup-covered waffle, all you can taste is…well, *nothing*.
   14. Whether or not you’ve actually experienced something like this, I think all of us know what it’s like to lose a sense of *something* one way or another.
   15. So what about the times when we lose our sense of God’s love?
   16. **Maybe it’s season of struggling with your faith. Or a hard trial that you’re enduring. Or maybe it’s just going through all these isolating months of a pandemic.**
   17. **What do you do when you lose the sense that God genuinely loves you?**
   18. This morning, we’re continuing on in our series looking at the **diverse excellencies of Jesus Christ.**
   19. And what we hope to accomplish in this series is to stir up, to stoke, to increase your affections and your love for Jesus by looking at all the different ways that he is, on one hand, infinitely *great* and *majestic* and *glorious*.
   20. And on the other hand, *servant-hearted* and *lowly* and *meek*.
   21. Now in your Bibles, I invite you to turn with me to the book of John, chapter 13.
   22. Last week, Minister Henry helped us understand that to be truly great in the kingdom of God is to serve others humbly as Christ has served us. This morning, I want to turn our attention to just exactly *how* Christ has served us. And so we’ll be focusing on verses 1-11.
   23. And as we walk through this passage, **I want to point out three answers to the question: what do you do when you lose the sense that God genuinely loves you?**
2. **My first point is this: Recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s shocking love for you.**
   1. Now our story takes place during the time of the Jewish Passover.
   2. The people of Israel would slaughter a lamb and eat unleavened bread to remind themselves of how God, during Moses’ time, “struck down the firstborn in the land of Egypt,” but *passed over* Jewish homes when he saw the blood of the lamb covering their doorposts (Exod. 12:29).[[1]](#footnote-1)
   3. Let’s start reading in chapter 13, verse 1: “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*” (emphasis mine).
   4. Now it’s interesting that while all four biographers of Jesus in the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—write about how Jesus spent his last Passover meal with his disciples, only John thought it important enough to tell us about this particular story of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet.
   5. And it makes sense. One of the great themes that runs throughout John’s book is the theme of God’s love.
   6. Just think of the most well-known verse in all of his writings—John 3:16: “For God so *loved* the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (emphasis mine).
   7. And so what follows is John showing us just exactly *how much* Jesus loved his own people. He showed them “the full extent of his love” (John 13:1, NIV).
   8. “He loved them *to the end*.”
   9. Let’s read on in verse 2: “During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”
   10. If you were a Jew, you’d be *shocked* at what we just read. The disciples certainly were. For ancient Jews, footwashing was something pretty much only *slaves* did.
   11. But not just any slave. No, *Jewish* slaves wouldn’t even do something like this.
   12. This was something only non-Jewish, Gentile slaves were asked to do.[[2]](#footnote-2)
   13. For the most part, *friends* wouldn’t even do this for one another.[[3]](#footnote-3)
   14. And what’s more, there’s no evidence *anywhere* in ancient Jewish or Greco-Roman literature “of a superior washing the feet of an inferior.”[[4]](#footnote-4)
   15. This is it. This is the only time recorded in ancient history that we know of where this reversal of roles takes place.
   16. What Jesus did here was completely counter-cultural. It was completely *shocking* to the ears of ancient listeners that he would wash feet at all.
   17. You know, when we read a story like this, it’s so easy to let the familiarity of it dampen how we feel.
   18. But just think about it.
   19. It was completely *unnecessary* for Jesus to show this kind of humility towards his disciples.
   20. He could’ve *easily* skipped over this footwashing episode and just moved on with the rest of dinner.
   21. *But he didn’t.*
   22. And John, having personally had own feet washed by Jesus thought it necessary enough to write this story down so that for all of time, we can see and behold Jesus, the great King of the universe, maker of heaven and earth, doing something that would be even beneath *us* if we were ancient Jews back then.
   23. And what’s more, notice that Judas Iscariot was there. The one among the twelve disciples who was about to betray him. And Jesus knew it!
   24. Jesus knew who his betrayer was and yet he didn’t just leave him out of the footwashing party.
   25. *Jesus washed Judas’s feet*.
   26. What Jesus did was not only counter-cultural. It was counter-intuitive. If your enemy was sitting right in front of you, which of us would have done what Jesus did?
   27. Sometimes, it takes something shocking, something completely unexpected, to help us recover our sense of just how incredibly *stunning* the love of God is for us.
   28. The prophet Hosea is a great example of this. Remember what God told this prophet to do? Shockingly, he says to him, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord” (Hosea 1:2).
   29. So Hosea, in obedience, does exactly just that. He goes and marries a woman, named Gomer. They have children together. But soon after, Gomer breaks this relationship and commits adultery with another lover.
   30. Then God says to Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods” (Hosea 3:1).
   31. This was meant to symbolize God’s relentless love for the people of Israel.
   32. And what’s shocking about God asking one of his faithful prophets to go through all this is really what should shock us about God’s love for us. Even with all the ways we’ve lusted after other things in this world and pursued other lovers, God’s relentless love for us remains unchanged.
   33. When you think about Jesus washing feet, I know that the shocking nature of it all is lost because footwashing really isn’t a part of our culture these days. It’s not something that triggers many emotions for us.
   34. But what I want more than anything is for you to put yourself in the shoes of a first-century Jew hearing John’s letter being read to you. Imagine the shock that you’d feel that a man named Jesus, who claimed to be very God himself, would stoop down to such a level as footwashing to show just how much he really loves you.
   35. There’s no holds barred. There’s no limit. There’s no boundaries to Jesus’s love for you.
   36. It’s easy to become numb or lose our sense of God’s love for us during spiritually dry seasons in our lives.
   37. **So let this scene of Jesus stooping down to wash his disciples’ feet *jolt* us back to the reality that Jesus was for real. He’s *serious* about his love for you.**
   38. So what do you do when you lose the sense that God genuinely loves you? First, recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s shocking love for you.
3. **And second, recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love for you.**
   1. Let’s read on in verse 6: “He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, ‘Lord, do you wash my feet?’ 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.’ Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’”
   2. Now this is where the tension in our story builds up. Jesus is going around the dining table, washing each of his disciples’ feet, one by one.
   3. Imagine the silent stares the disciples give each other as their master, dressed as a servant, bends down to clean off their dusty feet.
   4. Imagine the awkwardness. Imagine each disciple squirming a bit as he uncomfortably watches Jesus scrubbing one foot. And then the next.
   5. When it’s Peter’s turn, out of his typical brashness, he breaks the silence and calls out defiantly, “Are *you* going to wash *my* feet?”[[5]](#footnote-5)
   6. The disciples all turn their attention from Peter to Jesus. Silent. Waiting what their master would say in response.
   7. And what does Jesus say to Peter? “You won’t understand what I’m doing right now. But if I don’t wash your feet, you have no share with me.” If I don’t wash your feet, Peter, we can’t fellowship with one another. You can’t have a relationship with me.[[6]](#footnote-6)
   8. Now if all Jesus was talking about was literally just the act of footwashing here, *none* of this would make sense. But this exchange between Jesus and Peter clues us into the fact that this footwashing scene is not just about footwashing.
   9. *There’s something bigger at play here.*
   10. And that *something* is that Jesus washing his disciples’ feet was really pointing to the cross. In washing his disciples feet, Jesus was pointing to an even greater way he would soon be humiliated for his people.
   11. Being mocked and slain and ultimately hung on a cross for all to see, shedding his blood, in order to atone for the sins of his people.
   12. Washing them. Cleansing them. To take away their sins once and for all.[[7]](#footnote-7)
   13. So now it makes sense why Peter *had* to have his feet washed. It was a symbol of being united with Christ.
   14. Peter comes to his senses and understands at least something of what Jesus was trying to say. So we find him shouting, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”
   15. After Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, when all the pieces finally came together, I can only imagine the sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love that came over Peter as he thought back to the night Jesus washed his feet.
   16. And it’s this very sense of wonder that I want *us* to recover as well.
   17. I still remember the Sunday morning during the fall of 2004 when the gospel became real to me. It wasn’t just something I understood in my mind, but it struck my heart.
   18. Even though I believed in Christ when I was around eight years old, I was running away from God as an eighteen year old.
   19. Sin, in the form of an addiction to pornography, had *ravished* my life.
   20. I’d become *numb* to this sin. And every sense I once had of God’s love for me was gone.
   21. David Nasser, a former Muslim who became a Christian evangelist, was the guest preacher at a Baptist church I was attending.
   22. That morning was the morning the Holy Spirit *sovereignly* awakened me, allowing me to recover my sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love. David Nasser preached the simple, but old truths of the gospel to us.
   23. Christianity is about recognizing that you’re a sinner in need of a Savior. There’s *nothing* you can do to earn God’s love for you. But you can be saved and made right with God by repenting of your sins and believing that Christ’s death on the cross is enough to atone for your sins before Almighty God.
   24. And he said that morning, “If you’re a Christian, you’re as righteous as you’ll ever be in God’s sight.” What an astounding statement! No matter how unclean I feel inside, by faith, God sees me and he sees you as perfectly righteous because he sees *Christ* in us.
   25. So “there’s nothing more you can do to earn his love for you. And there’s nothing you can do to take his love away from you.”
   26. And for an eighteen year old who was wondering whether there was any hope left for a sinner like me, the Holy Spirit restored my sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love for me by reminding me that Christians are made right with God by *faith alone*.
   27. And no one, *nothing*, can snatch us out his hands (John 10:28).
   28. George Whitefield, the great 18th century preacher, captures what I came to understand of the gospel with these words: “For as a man’s worthiness was not the cause of God’s giving him Christ’s righteousness; so neither shall his unworthiness be a cause of his taking it away.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
   29. Friends, if you’re a Christian, I know how easy it is to lose this sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love for you.
   30. When’s the last time you genuinely understood the depths of your sins? And the great *chasm* that stands between you and an infinitely holy God?
   31. When’s the last time you felt an overwhelming sense of joy and marvel and awe at just how much Christ loves you that he would bridge that great chasm for you?
   32. If you’re in a place where you’ve lost a sense of God’s love for you, look no further than the cross.
   33. Doesn’t necessarily mean you’ll always feel *emotionally* loved by God.
   34. We can’t trust our feelings on this because feelings come and go. You have to rely on a *different* sense.
   35. And that’s the sense of spiritual sight. *Look* to Christ. *Gaze* upon his cross. And *see* his death-embracing love for you.
   36. Pray, with all your heart, that God would restore the joy of your salvation (Psalm 51:7-12). Plead with him to renew his sense of love for you. And may he allow you to *rediscover* the wonders of his mercy through the gospel.
   37. If you aren’t a Christian yet, will you be like Peter and refuse to have Jesus wash your feet? Don’t you realize that apart from being washed clean by the blood of the Lamb, you stand condemned in all your sins before a holy God?
   38. Why will you refuse? Why won’t you come?
   39. Ask God to give you the gift of faith. New taste buds that delight no longer in this pleasures of this world. A new heart that beats to please God. And new eyes to see his death-embracing love for you.
   40. Humbly come and let Jesus wash your feet, and cleansed of your sins.
   41. So what do you do when you lose the sense that God genuinely loves you? First, recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s shocking love for you. Second, recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s death-embracing love for you.
4. **And third, recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s ever-forgiving love for you.**
   1. Peter, at this point in the story, realizes that he was wrong to have refused Jesus washing his feet in the first place. Which is why he changes his mind and asks Jesus to wash his hands and his head as well.
   2. But, here, Jesus shifts what he means when using footwashing as a metaphor to teach us another lesson.
   3. There’s a difference between being cleansed once and for all by faith in Christ’s atoning work on the cross versus being cleansed for the daily sins we commit after becoming Christians.[[9]](#footnote-9)
   4. Look down at verse 10 with me. “Jesus said to him, ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.’ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’”
   5. One way to interpret this is that Jesus was drawing on something from the Jewish culture of his day that his disciples would easily have understood.
   6. Let’s say you’re headed to someone’s house for a dinner party one day. You’ve taken a shower. You’ve put on your best clothes. And you’re all ready to go.
   7. But walking to your friend’s house, in sandals, on unpaved roads, would most likely dirty your feet again. And so you’d be offered a footwashing right when you arrived. You don’t need another bath. But you *do* need your feet cleaned.[[10]](#footnote-10)
   8. And this is most likely what Jesus is talking about when he says, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.”
   9. For anyone of us who has faith in Jesus, our fundamental salvation was achieved on the day we believed in the gospel. Our bodies are already clean. But we do, in a sense,need our feet washed by Jesus *daily*.
   10. Moments each day where we repent of sins committed the day before or the week before and to be cleansed. To have our consciences cleared before God again.
   11. And I think this is where we sometimes miss an opportunity to recover a sense of wonder at Jesus’s ever-forgiving love for us. I mean it’s great to know that as a Christian, your sins are forgiven once and for all.
   12. That you don’t have to attend a certain number of church services or not mess up again for a number of days in order to be forgiven. No, Christ’s blood shed for you was once and for all.
   13. Covering each and every sin that you’ve committed in the past and will ever commit in the future.
   14. This would have been *unbelievable* for ancient Jews. Because every sin, even unintentional ones, required an actual, physical sacrifice, often in the form of a slain lamb or goat (Lev. 4-6:7).
   15. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”
   16. But these sacrifices could never truly take away sins (Heb. 10:11). Priests had to offer them again and again on behalf of the people and even for themselves.
   17. Which is why Hebrews 9:26 tells us that Jesus “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” And by shedding his own blood on the cross for undeserved sinners like you and me, Jesus “has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).
   18. Church, I want you to know that I’m praying for those of you today who are struggling to feel and to sense God’s love for you. I know how painful it can be to feel *far* from him.
   19. And I want so very much for each of you to recover a sense of Jesus’s love for you—his shocking love, his death-embracing love, his ever-forgiving love for you.
   20. But I realize that what I’m telling you is *what* needs to happen. Not actually *how* to get it to happen.
   21. And what I want to stress, more than anything else today, is that you and I can’t just recover these senses on our own. It’s going to take a sovereign work of the Spirit of God to renew a sense of God’s presence in our lives, to renew a sense of wonder at his love.
   22. In a word, we need *revival*. We need a genuine, Spirit-wrought revival.
   23. I know this word is thrown around a lot of times without much explaining. So to understand revival, you first have to understand what “gospel renewal” is.
   24. Tim Keller defines it this way: “*Personal* gospel renewal means the gospel doctrines of sin and grace are actually experienced, not just known intellectually…[it]…comes from seeing in ourselves deeper layers of self-justification, unbelief, and self-righteousness than we have ever seen before.”[[11]](#footnote-11)
   25. And when a group of believers, large or small, undergoes this kind of personal gospel renewal at the same time, you have what’s called *corporate* gospel renewal. In other words, a revival.[[12]](#footnote-12)
   26. Spiritual revival takes place when the Holy Spirit works in extraordinary ways through the ordinary means of grace, often through hearing God’s Word preached.[[13]](#footnote-13)
5. **Conclusion**
   1. During the summer of 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” It wasn’t the first time he preached this sermon. But something remarkable happened as a result of the Holy Spirit working through him when he preached it this second time at another church in Enfield, Connecticut.
   2. Now Edwards wasn’t known to be a dramatic preacher. He was said to have spoken in a monotone voice as he read from his sermon manuscripts. But people would literally “[pass] out” as they sat under his preaching.[[14]](#footnote-14)
   3. Edwards used carefully chosen words and images to press his listeners’ consciences into realizing just how *real* the wrath of God was against their sins. That day, Edwards couldn’t even get to the end of his sermon because people were wailing and crying out, “What shall I do to be saved[?]”[[15]](#footnote-15)
   4. They were *cut to the heart* because they saw the true state of their souls before an infinitely holy God. And this was exactly where Jesus wanted them to be. Because then and only then would they be *stunned* back into the realities of the glorious truths of the gospel.
   5. Church, isn’t this what we all need? It’s so easy to grow numb to the gospel and lose our sense of God’s love for us. So let’s pray together for spiritual revival in our day, even in the middle of a pandemic. Maybe *especially* in the middle of a pandemic.
   6. Revival could show up in spectacular ways or it could just be a quiet movement of the Spirit among us.[[16]](#footnote-16) Let’s pray that God would help each of us recover a sense of wonder at his love for us—his shocking, death-embracing, and ever-forgiving love for us.

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