

Introduction: In the book, *The Living Unknown Soldier*, the author tells us of the story of Octave Mojoin (Monjwa). He was a French soldier returned from German captivity and was found wandering the streets of Lyon, France and picked up by authorities. Octave had no memory of who he was. No sense of self. Which led to him having no continuity with the past and no direction for his future.

He was finally claimed and had to be reminded and told daily who he was, where he was from, and what was doing.

The foot washing scene in John's Gospel is the introduction to the final discourse and teaching Jesus will give his disciples. Often called, "The Farewell Discourse."

But this night, John will remind us where he was from, who he is, and where he was going.

Main Idea: Jesus is glorified by his suffering service for humanity; we are to imitate his model of humble service and sacrificial love for others. This is our defining orientation.

The Passover Setting: Jn. 13:1 "It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Once again, John has returned to an intimate portrait of Jesus during a High Festival in Israel—the Passover. This scene takes place "before the Passover" or in preparation for their last meal together.

1. We find our security in our identity in Christ.

Jn. 13:2-5 *“²The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.”*

V. 3 Jesus knew his power, his origin, and his destination. He was completely secure in himself. This statement is in contrast to the jittery insecurity that earthly rulers possessed. **The Herodian Family: Antipater, Herod the Great, Archelaus, Antipas, Agrippa, Philip**—that dynasty of rulers suffered because of their paranoia, insecurity which led to atrocities against their own family. **Imprisonments, mass murders, intermarriage characterized their rule—not only were they ruthless, sinful rulers who were obsessed with keeping their power—they were anxiously trying to appease Rome and the people by demonstrating their legitimacy.** Jesus, by contrast knows his origin, his destiny, his power.

I think it’s safe to say that Jesus is comfortable in his own skin.

V. 4 **“So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waste.”**

Background: Foot washing was done by servants, Women, or children and never the host or owner of a home. Now, this surely is a symbolic action which portrays two realities of Christ’s condescension:

(1) It symbolizes Jesus divesting himself of the glories of His heavenly throne in order to put on the lowly form of a human servant. Notice however that this act of humiliation is symbolic of his entire incarnate life—that is, the one who was with God in the beginning because he was God from eternity, this Almighty-Word from Heaven tabernacling/dwelling in human form is itself an act of debasement and humility.

(2) This is symbolic of how the disciples are to act towards one another.

Who are you?

- You are a forgiven saint.
- You are loved beyond words. Human beings are designed to receive and reciprocate love. The key is presence. There's something inside of you designed to automatically, reflexively return that love.
- You have eternal worth and value. Your life, your struggles, your hopes and dreams, your character development—you matter to him.
- You are destined for the unspeakable glories of heaven.
- You are promised new creation—a new resurrected body in a new resurrected heaven and earth.

Jesus was comfortable in his own skin. Because he knew where he came from, he knew where he was going, and he understood the power of the Spirit within him. And our identity is grounded, rooted, found in Him.

2. We cannot experience the cleansing, healing power of forgiveness unless we surrender to Christ.

Jn. 13:6-11 “He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” ⁷ Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” ⁸ “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” ⁹ “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” ¹⁰ Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. 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 everyone was clean.”

V. 6 Simon Peter’s question is actually a statement with an interrogative tone. “You! Are going to wash MY feet!”

The reason why this is unthinkable for Peter is because of the Master-Disciple relationship in the ancient world.

Masters never took a genuflecting role—a subservient role to their students in whatever guild they were in. It’s just not done in this world. Now, this is especially true of a holy man like Jesus.

Many of the streets in the Herod Family’s Kingdoms were unpaved, narrow, and claustrophobic with makeshift markets and shoppers, dogs, donkeys, sheep and goats commonly relieved themselves in the streets, and so foot-washing was a customary practice in the ancient world done only by slaves. The servant would bring a water jar and a towel, removing the sandals and cleaning the accumulated dust, grime, smell and any animal excrement. As disciples of a Great Master teacher, the disciples themselves are exempt (legally) from this practice.

John points out in his letter three things regarding this:

1 Jn. 1:6-10 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

First things First: we must acknowledge our sin—“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Self-righteousness—the belief that I am ok because this is just the way I am; my lusts, desires, wants, ambitions—I’m just made this way so whatever I want is what I want. SO I am going to actualize myself at all costs.

And for anyone to tell me that every craven, wanton and lewd desire of my heart is justified because I want it. So long as a man or woman thinks, there is no height from which we have fallen, no objective standard or relationship from which we have come short—and thus no there is nothing to repent or to confess that person can never be served, helped or aided by the blood of Jesus.

Secondly: we must walk in the light as he is in the light. This does not require perfectionism in this life—but it is the discipline of ongoing repentance. Dragging our lust, craven fears and failures into the light of God’s radiant son and his cross.

Thirdly: confession, the discipline of repentance and reliance on Christ’s all-sufficient work—gives us a holy communion with the body—fellowship. And our healing and life and abundance is not found in isolation but in fellowship. Our growth, and the joy accompanying that growth is found in the body, not apart from it.

Peter discovered that if Jesus did not serve him he would have no communion with Christ. And the way Jesus serves you is to wash us clean from sin, as we confess our faith in him and our sins in the flesh.

3. Christ's symbolic action is the norm for the Christian life.

Jn. 13:12-17 “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. 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.** ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

V.12 “He put on his clothes and returned to his place...” This is surely another symbolic sentence. Depicting what Jesus has done in his humiliation as the Son of Man. He eventually returns and “puts on” the glory he had with the Father before the worlds began.

V.13 “You call me teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am.” Jesus’ intentionally humility does not negate nor deny his essential nature or place of authority. Even while wearing the towel, while divesting himself of his rabbinic robe—Jesus *is still the Teacher and their Lord*. He says “rightly so, for that is what I Am.”

V.14 “You also should wash one another’s feet...I have set you an example that you should do for each other what I have symbolically done for you” Jesus’ selfless service is the model by which he expects all believers to pattern their lives after. Jesus’ selfless service is the standard and the model for all who claim him as Savior and Lord. This flips upside down the social expectations of Jesus’ world. One Rabbi, *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* (27; 56:B) declared that if a disciple or any host should fail to serve a visiting scholar/rabbi, then that house should be put to death. This reflects the enormous respect and veneration of leaders in ancient society. **Master-teachers were greatly honored—the greater the standing of the Teacher the greater public honor was due him. At banquets, public assemblies, tribunals, weddings, funerals, festivals and weekly synagogue meetings, the greater the honor of the Teacher the greater seat of authority and honor was reserved for him. And this was a rigid class system of the status-conscious.**

Phil. 2:2-8. But the act of foot washing also symbolizes Jesus serving his “own” or disciples in vicarious death. “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” It’s strange how Christians often cite this passage out of context. **The Christology without the Ecclesiology.** The high doctrine of Christ as God condescending to human form. But the context is relational. Here’s how John put it in another book

Yet notice just how Jesus flips this—No! he subverts those social expectations declaring in effect, “Not only will I not kill you or have you put to death for not washing my feet, as Rabbi Aboth insisted—but I’m going to die for you—in your place. On your behalf.

V.17 “Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them.” Jesus does not allow us to get away with mere meticulous Bible study. I hope all of you know your Bibles. I hope you all become ardent students of God’s holy, uniquely authoritative Word in this book. But if you do that, it simply will not do. I’ll say it again; I hope every person in here has the practical equivalent of a Master of Divinity in biblical theology. I want you to be the smartest, sharpest, biblically literate Christians that you can be. But if you achieve that or anything close to that—it simply will not do. **A scholar of the Word whose heart is frozen toward God’s people, lacking empathy, compassion, selfless service—is frankly the most dangerous person in the church.** Because that word has not translated to an urgency to model Christ’s selfless love towards others.

Cruciformity—A life patterned after the sacrificial love of Jesus on the cross.

1. We find our security in our identity in Christ.
2. We cannot experience the cleansing, healing power of forgiveness unless we surrender to Christ.
3. Christ's symbolic action is the norm for the Christian life.

Communion:

Benediction: In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

- ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.