

# THE FOOTWASHING

## John 13:1–5

### TIME TO LEAVE THIS WORLD (JOHN 13:1–3)

- verse 1 is an introduction to the second half of John's Gospel (chapters 13–21)
- 13:1–35 is inverted parallelism emphasizing Jesus' love for his disciples ("loved His own" and "loved them to the uttermost" 13:1; "as I have loved you" 13:34–35)—words for love (*agape*) are found 6 times in chapters 1–12 and 31 times in chapters 13–17
  - chapters 13–17 take place in the Upper Room in Jerusalem
  - earlier Satan entered Judas and put the thought of betrayal in his mind (Luke 22:3–6)
- God the Father gave Jesus his (1) anointing with the Spirit (Luke 3:21–22), (2) Kingdom (Luke 22:29), (3) authority over men (John 17:2) and over all creation (Matt 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 13:3), (4) message (John 12:49–50), (5) works (John 5:36; 17:4), (6) glory (John 17:22; cf. 1:14; 2:11; 11:4), (7) all judgment (John 5:22, 27), and (8) life in himself (John 5:26) and authority to grant eternal life (John 5:21; 6:40; 10:28)
- Jesus was fully aware of his high position when he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:3)

### JESUS PREPARES FOR THE FOOTWASHING (JOHN 13:4)

- the preparations are vivid, detailed, and mentioned one right after the other to focus attention on what is about to happen
  - the footwashing took place during the meal—not upon arrival, as was customary (cf. "during supper" 13:2)
  - the footwashing must be seen in light of the dispute among the disciples as to who will be the greatest in the Kingdom (Luke 22:24–27)—perhaps this dispute arose from quibbling over the seating arrangement around the table
    - they were wearing sandals and their feet were dirty and uncomfortable after a two mile walk from Bethany
  - it was customary for slaves to wash the feet of their masters and guests (cf. Gen 18:4; 1 Sam. 25:41; Luke 7:44; John 1:27): footwashing was done by Gentile slaves, wives, and children (*Mekilta* on Exodus 21:2 [82a])—male Jewish slaves were exempt
  - to maintain secrecy no slaves were present in the Upper Room, so it was the duty of the disciples to wash their Rabbi's feet
    - no doubt they saw the water pitcher, basin, and long linen towel as they entered the Upper Room, but they reclined at the table with dirty feet rather than humble themselves by volunteering to wash one another's feet
      - they wanted to be served rather than serve, so each waited for the other to make the first move
    - everything was ready—the water pitcher (ewer), basin, and long linen towel (Latin *lintheum*; cf. 1 Peter 5:5)
      - apparently Jesus waited awhile for one of his disciples to assume the duty of a servant—but no one did
  - so Jesus finally rose from the couch, took off his garments (plural—his robe, tunic, and belt)—leaving only his loin-cloth—and assumed the dress and role of a slave
  - he tied the long linen towel around his waist, poured water over their feet (cf. 2 Kings 3:11), and dried them with the free end of the towel

- "They were ready to fight for a throne, but not for a towel!" (Merrill C. Tenney)

### JESUS BEGINS WASHING HIS DISCIPLES' FEET (JOHN 13:5)

- we don't know whose feet he washed first or the order in which he washed their feet
  - he even washed the feet of Judas—showing his great love (cf. 13:1)
- the footwashing rebuked their lack of humility more than any words could have done
  - it proves "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27)
- message of the footwashing: the only thing more humbling and loving I can do is to die for your sins (cf. 13:1)
  - their feet were washed by God's chosen vicegerent—the anointed ruler of all God's creation (cf. John 13:3)