

MONTHLY THEME: CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRANSFORMED LIFE

SUNDAY THEME: DEMONSTRATION OF HUMILITY

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Text: **John 13:1-13**

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Biblical Humility

Jesus is the ultimate standard for biblical humility. What he said, and how he lived ought to serve as our definitive guide. In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, he made it clear that true humility means utter dependence upon the mercy of God.



1. Utter dependence on God's mercy

Luke tells us that he gave this teaching to counter a tendency among some to "trust in their own righteousness":

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:10–14 ESV)

Lessons in the parable

- I. In this parable, to be “humble” is to be aware of your own sin and unworthiness and to cast yourself entirely upon the mercy and undeserved kindness of Almighty God. It is in that sense, very similar to what Jesus meant by “poverty of spirit”. In the Sermon on the Mount he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3 ESV).
- II. People who are “poor in spirit” are aware of their desperate position and entirely dependent upon the mercy and kindness of God. They are humble – in the biblical sense of the word.

2. **Unconcern for power, prestige and position**

According to Jesus, humble people are not scrambling for power, prestige and position. They take the lowest seat and they are content to function as servants. Jesus often contrasted his own expectation for his disciples with the proud and self-serving conduct of the scribes and Pharisees:

Matthew 23:8–12 ESV

“But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. 10 Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you shall I be your servant. 12 Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Mark 9:35–37 ESV

In Mark’s Gospel, when Jesus caught the disciples arguing over rank and seniority, he called them together and said to them:

“If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

Lesson

To be humble – in a biblical sense – is to disregard all concern for rank and privilege and to live one’s life in service to the least of Christ’s disciples. It is to accept all, serve all and prefer all – in Jesus’ name.

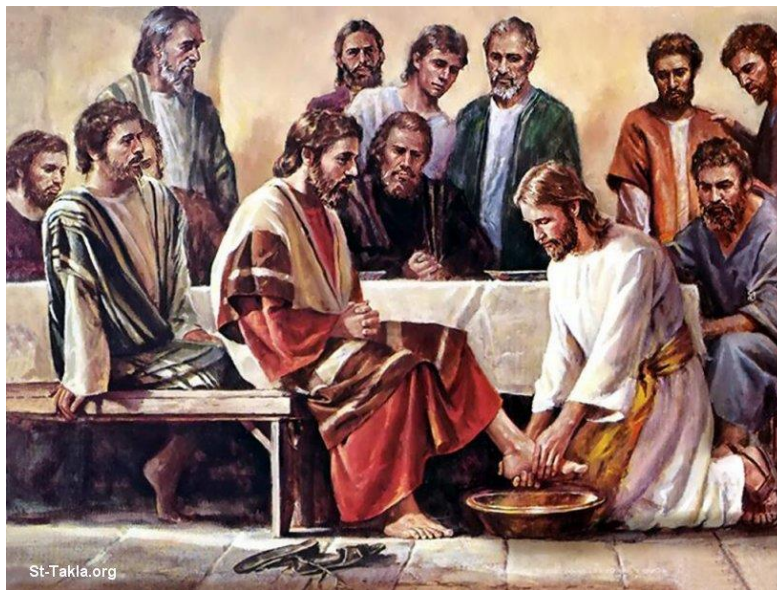
3. **Unquestioning acceptance of God’s Word**

Jesus is the ultimate example of biblical humility, *"who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."* (Philippians 2:6–8 ESV)

In brief

There is no biblical definition of humility that does not include absolute, unquestioning obedience to the Word of God. In Isaiah 66:2 God says, *"But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word"* (Isaiah 66:2 ESV).

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET (13:1–20)



13:1–2 Before the Feast of the Passover. NKJV

Passover, also known as Pesach in Hebrew, is a significant Jewish festival commemorating the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, as narrated in the Bible. The story of Passover is primarily found in the Book of Exodus, particularly in chapters 12 through 14.

Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father. NKJV

Because Jesus was fully aware that his time had come to leave this world and return to his Father, he devoted his last hours to instructing and encouraging his disciples.

Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. NKJV

The statement means that Jesus continued his devotion to his disciples until the very end of his life. Before he left them, he wanted to express his love to them, one by one—and this he would do in a way that would surprise them.

JESUS SHOWS HIS LOVE

Jesus knew that one of his disciples had already decided to betray him. Another would deny him by the next morning. Even this night, they would all desert him. In the next hours they would repeatedly display ignorance, laziness, and lack of trust.

Lesson

Jesus knows us as fully as he knew those disciples. He knows intimately of every time and every way that we have denied or deserted him. Yet knowing us, he willingly died for us. Jesus continually displays his love toward us and reaches out to us.

Application

Are we prepared to love one another with the same kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us?

The evening meal was being served. NIV

This was probably the official time for the Passover meal, indicated by verse 1. And this was a special Passover, for it was the last meal Jesus would eat with his disciples, and during this meal he would institute the “Lord’s Supper” (Matthew 26:17–30)

The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. NRSV

Jesus had already called Judas “a devil” in 6:70 because Jesus knew that Judas would cooperate with the devil in perpetrating Jesus’ death. Thus, the devil and Judas corroborated in Jesus’ betrayal. Indeed, Satan entered Judas to carry out the actual betrayal (see 13:27).

13:3 Jesus, knowing ... that He had come from God and was going to God. NKJV

Jesus, the Son of God, knew his origin and his destiny. He knew that he would soon be returning to his Father. Being assured of his own destiny, he focused his attention on the disciples and showed them what it meant for him to become their Servant and for them to serve one another.

13:4 Got up from the table, took off his outer robe. NRSV

This action portrayed how Jesus was willing to divest/deprive himself of being “in the form of God” to take on “the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:5–6).

He then wrapped a towel around his waist NIV

Like an apron, and humbled himself by preparing to do a task normally assigned to a servant. The one least compelled to take up the duty was the first to eagerly volunteer. How unlike the natural human response of "Let someone else do it!"

13:5 He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. NIV

Jesus was the model servant, and he showed his servant attitude to his disciples. Foot washing was a common act in Bible times.

13:6–9 All the disciples accepted the washing until Jesus came to Peter, who questioned Jesus: "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" NRSV

Jesus did not provide Peter with an explanation, other than that Peter would understand the significance of the washing sometime in the future: "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." NIV

Later in the New Testament, Peter explains his understanding of what Jesus had done (1 Peter 5:5–6).

Peter came to realize that humble service meant obedience to Christ. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, he was demonstrating his ultimate sacrificial act—giving his life for them on the cross.

"You will never wash my feet." NRSV

Peter did not feel worthy that his Master should be acting like a slave toward him! This was not an expression of arrogance but of confusion. Peter felt he should be washing the Master's feet—not the other way around. Peter still did not understand Jesus' teaching that to be a leader, a person must be a servant.

Lesson

We need to remember that the true point of serving is to obey and imitate Jesus Christ. Likewise, accepting service from others is accepting Christ's service. Christ elevated serving others as the highest pursuit to which we can dedicate our lives.

Jesus responded: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." NIV

There are two possible meanings for this sentence:

- (1) Jesus meant that unless he washed away Peter's sins by his death on the cross, then Peter could have no relationship with him.
- (2) Jesus meant that unless Peter submitted to him and allowed Jesus to minister in this way, Peter would never learn the lesson of humility.

13:10–11 "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean." NRSV

After one has bathed, another bath is not necessary at the end of the day. The person is still clean—except for the feet, which are constantly soiled by the dust of the ground. A clean and bathed person just needs to have his or her feet rinsed. According to the customs of those times, once a person had bathed, he or she needed only to wash his or her feet upon entering a person's home.

To be bathed by Jesus meant to be washed by his living word

Later in the meal Jesus returned to this theme when he told his disciples, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you" (15:3 NIV). It was Jesus' teaching, and the acceptance of his words, that separated the true believers from all the people throughout Jesus' ministry.

"You are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason, he said, "Not all of you are clean." NRSV

Jesus referred to Judas Iscariot (see 13:18), suggesting that Judas was not a true believer in Jesus. Though Jesus had washed Judas's feet, Judas was not clean, for he had not come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus already knew that this man would be used by Satan to bring about the events that unfold in the final chapters of this Gospel.

BETRAYAL

John made it clear that Judas was the specific reason Jesus said, "though not all of you." But John must have also had his future readers in mind. If among the original disciples there was one not true, future groups of disciples would also discover among themselves those who were false followers. This happened later in the first century and has continued through the years. Many have betrayed Christ and his people.

Lesson

Today's readers of John should heed this implicit warning: Are we clean? Will our commitment stand firm and our faith sure? Will we be prepared to endure even when those who have seemed strong in the faith fail?

13:12–13 "Do you understand what I have done for you?" NIV

Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet demonstrated love in action. Jesus was their Teacher and Lord, meaning he was on a higher level than they; yet he assumed a position of humility and service because he loved those he served.

13:14–16 "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 should do as I have done to you." NKJV Jesus commanded his disciples to serve one another in love according to the example he set because "a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him." NKJV

13:17 "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." NKJV

We are blessed (happy, joyful, fulfilled), not because of what we know, but because of what we do with what we know. God's grace to us finds its completion in the service we, as recipients of his grace, perform for others. We will find our greatest joy in obeying Christ by serving others.

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