

John 13:1-17 (Edward Acomb) 53759

Christian Truth: Volume 24, Girded Servant, The (13:1-17)

John 13

What a page is this that now lies before us, full of the richest grace of the blessed Lord, and at the same time, abounding with instruction which the people of God in their wilderness journey find and prove to be indispensable. Forever be adored the God of all grace, who not only has met our need as sinners, in the sacrifice of His Son, but, who also in the same blessed One is meeting the need of His beloved people traversing a scene of defilement where temptation and trial abound. And what exquisite grace on the part of the Lord Jesus to give us, in the act of washing His disciples' feet, a token of His unchanging love, when He would be away in the glory, and we left to testify of Him in the world, as well as a specimen of His ministries for us in the presence of God, as He said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." What a proof that He ever thinks of us, and cares for us, in all our path of trial through this world! He is now on high for us, the glory-girded Servant.

On the cross, the work that has effected our, cleansing was done forever; the sacrifice was offered "once" never to be repeated. And those to whom the blood is applied, are "perfected forever" according to its infinite value; the blood is never said to be applied again.

But the work of the blessed Lord, in the presence of God for us, will not cease till He has taken us to Himself. While any part of the Church is here in the place of testimony, His work will go on for them on high, as the "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb. 8:2). If the Lord has sat down forever, as touching His sacrificial work (Heb. 10:12), He has not ceased His ministries for us as our High Priest and as our Advocate, the One girded to keep us clean and in holy communion with God His Father and Himself. How this fact endears the blessed Lord to our hearts! How it bows the soul in the presence of such love that is never wearied of serving, and leads us to adore Him who has by virtue of His mighty sacrifice, and the indwelling of the blessed Spirit of God, linked us with Himself, and charged Himself with all our affairs, and has pledged His own word to bring us to Himself in the glory above.

What we have in this chapter is that which we have in view of the Lord's departure from the world to the Father. As the Lord "knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.... Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." John 13:1-5. By the words, "His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father," we learn that the Lord here contemplates His atoning work upon the cross as finished; as in John 17: "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do"; and that now He has His services in the presence of God for His people before Him, keeping them clean from the defilement of the world—living to keep them clean—loving them unto the end.

How marvelously blessed is all this! For who has not more or less realized his own weakness and failure? Yet to be able to turn to that love which is unchanging, and find in that heart what sustains ours even in the time of conscious failure, is what must bow the soul before Him who loved us, in holy worship.

Peter's ignorance is made the means of bringing out the efficacy of the two-fold work of Christ: His work upon the cross, and His work as the ascended One. First, "He that is washed [or bathed] needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." The cleansing "every whit" has reference to the cleansing by the blood from all sin; and he that is thus cleansed, needs not to be so cleansed again, but, in virtue of that cleansing, stands before God in the full value of that blood that has rolled every sin belonging to the believer into the sea of God's forgetfulness. Nothing can possibly affect this cleansing; the believer is once cleansed, and cleansed forever. He is "accepted in the beloved." This is divinely precious, imparting perfect peace to the heart and conscience of every one that reposes by faith upon the work of Christ. Faith appropriates to the soul and its deep need, all the intrinsic and eternal perfection of that "once" offered and eternally accepted sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. It stands in the presence of a holy God in undisturbed peace, in the blessed consciousness of there being nothing against it—no spot within, no cloud above, no wrath in God's heart, no fear in it! And what is the secret of it all? It is clean every whit, according to God's own estimate of the precious blood of His dear Son.

This cleansing was effected by the "blood of the cross"; and as that blood was shed "once," so the application of it is "once for all." If otherwise, if it is to be applied again, the precious blood of God's Son is made to be no more than the blood of bulls and goats, which in itself would be blasphemy. But as the application is "once," those to whom it is applied are perfected forever, because of its eternal efficacy; they are clean every whit, according to the words of Christ.

In the second place, there is the washing of the feet, and that may take place continually. As in the case of the priests of old, they were washed once, when consecrated to the priesthood; and as touching their standing as priests, this was never repeated; but daily they had to wash their feet at the laver before entering upon the services of the tabernacle. And so with the Christian; although clean every whit as touching his standing and acceptance, he needs the application of the "water of the ward" to keep him free from defilement, enabling him to go on in the service of the Lord in communion with Him. Hence the Lord's words to Peter, when he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet"—"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." It is all-important to notice that the Lord did not say, "Thou hast no part in Me, or I in you," but, "Thou hast no part with Me." That is to say, there can be no communion with the Lord in the way of service if this daily washing of the feet is neglected. It may be blessedly true that we are cleansed by the blood, and that no charge can be laid against us, and at the same time we may know but very little of what it is to have part "with" Christ. For this we need to know the blessed services of Christ above for us, opening our hearts to the cleansing application of the "word," and so retaining priestly energy in our souls, going on in communion with Christ—having part with Him.

Then, again, the blessed Lord not only gave us to understand that He was going away to exercise this holy, unwearied love on our behalf, but He would give us to see that He would have us with Himself in this service, as He said: "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

Now this is not merely an expression of humility, but rather the exercise of holy love that can never allow any evil. The blessed Lord exercises it above; and when any of His people fail, He applies the water of the Word by the Spirit, as shown in the act of washing the disciples' feet, and in this scripture: "Christ... loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:25, 26). Communion is suspended when defilement is contracted, and restored when it is cleansed away. But the Lord would have us in fellowship with Himself in this work-washing "one another's feet"—exercising the same holy, jealous love over each other; and this is no mean service to take part in. But is it merely humility? It is humility of the purest kind, but something more. It is the holy faithfulness of that love, which is in the fullest fellowship with Christ, about an erring brother-one defiled. And oh, what a service to be engaged in! We need, indeed, to eat the "sin offering in the holy place." None but those who are spiritual—those in full communion with the Master -can restore an erring brother. Alas! how often we are unable to wash one another's feet! Instead of cleansing them, we often make them the more defiled by our spiritual incapacity to wash them. How often we: do, by our own want of self-judgment, deprive ourselves of the privilege of washing "one another's feet." Do we pass over a brother's or our own failure? That is neither love to ourselves nor him. That is neither washing his feet, nor opening up our own hearts and consciences to the application of that word that Christ uses to wash ours. His love cannot bear the thought of defilement resting upon the least of His people. His heart will not allow this distance from Himself, necessarily caused by the failure. He must use the rod to effect His purpose. This is often terrible work for the one upon whom it is laid. Holy love strikes the blow; and then heals up the wound. The hand that plunges the sword of the Spirit into the conscience, to make it sensible of the sin allowed, is that which applies the balm to the wound when repentance is wrought and confession is made. We may treat failure lightly, but He cannot. And why? Because He loves us, and because it cost His precious blood-shedding to put it away.

What then? Let us walk in the spirit of self-judgment, of prayer, and of watchfulness, allowing the Word of our God to have full power with our own hearts and consciences; walking before Him who judges righteously; submitting to His gracious will; adoring Him for His constant love; abiding in communion with Him; having full part with Him; obeying His injunctions; and so be spiritually capacitated to wash each other's feet, the result of the exercise of holy love.

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