

A Puzzled Disciple

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[0:00] Hi, my name's Lynn and I've been a member at Brunfield for two years now. I'm going to read Psalm 51, verses 1 to 10. Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned. And done what is evil in your sight.

So you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth. Sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb.

You taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be white within snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God. And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Hi, my name is Derek and I'm Lynn's husband and I'm reading from the New Testament today.

[1:06] In John chapter 13, verses 1 through 20. 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. The evening meal was in progress and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon of Scariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God.

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped the towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, dragging him the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter and he said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet.

Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then, Lord, said Peter, replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. Jesus answered, those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet.

[2:13] Their whole body is clean, and you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew he was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one of them was clean. When he had finished washing your feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

Do you understand what I have done for you? he asked them. You call me teacher and lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is this messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you'll be blessed if you do them. I am not fairing to all of you. I know those that I have chosen, but this is to fulfil this passage of scripture.

He who shared my bread has turned against me. I am telling you now, before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I am who I am. Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send, accepts me.

[3:17] And whoever accepts me, accepts the one who sent me. Amen. Now let's pray for Ian before the sermon begins. And Lord, we thank you for the gift of your word, and as we think on these things, open our hearts and our minds to hear you.

We pray for Ian, and we give thanks for the gifts that you've given him. Pray for him, as he guides us through his messages, and opening our hearts to this. Amen. Good morning, everyone.

I'm Ian, and I'm delighted to repeat the welcome that Luca gave you earlier. We're continuing today our series of encounters with Jesus from John's Gospel, and we're looking at the passage that Derek just read to us under the title, A Puzzled Disciple, that disciple, of course, being Peter.

When I was growing up at Brunnsfield, one of my friends, John, was a talented artist. And one day John's father came to him and said, I've got a special job I want you to do.

I want you to make a sign that says, Divine Service performed here three times daily. John was a bit puzzled about what his father meant, but he dutifully went away, and in his best script, and with his best design, he produced a sign and brought it back.

[4 : 29] Divine Service performed here three times daily. And his father said to him, Right, that's great, well done. I want you to go and hang that over the sink in the kitchen, because that's where you have the opportunity in this house to perform divine service three times daily.

Well, it was a good lesson, and it was one that came to my mind as I was reading this passage for this morning. Not just because it features a basin and a towel.

Foot washing and dishwashing need both of these. But the lesson is really the same as the Lord is trying to get out to us today. We serve God by serving others, and we often need to do that in ways that might seem to dent our pride, might even sometimes seem mundane, or even demeaning.

And so we're going to look today at serving others, and also at being served by others. But there's a second significance of this bowl and towel.

In Matthew chapter 23, the Lord Jesus has a diatribe against the religious leaders of his day. Seven woes exposing their hypocrisy. And the Lord Jesus says, as one of them, Matthew 23, verse 25, Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!

[6 : 00] You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

Clean on the outside, but dirty on the inside. And that too is a lesson that Jesus is trying to present to us in this passage.

He has a discussion with Peter about bathing and about washing feet. But actually it emerges that really it's about being clean or being dirty inside.

So we'll be looking at clean feet and clean hearts. But first let's have a look at the backgrounds to this passage. We're on the eve of Calvary.

Within 24 hours, the Lord Jesus will have died on the cross for our sins. And throughout this passage in John's Gospel, there are references to that.

[7 : 05] For example, in verse 1 of chapter 13, it talks about the Lord Jesus loving his disciples to the end. The word could be translated to the finish.

And that parallels the Lord Jesus' final cry from the cross. It is finished. John talks about him laying aside his garment and taking it up again. And the Lord Jesus uses the same words earlier in the Gospel about laying down his life and taking it up again.

And there are several similar references as we go through. Very much in the Lord's mind and in John's mind as he writes, is the fact that the cross is very close.

But the disciples don't know that. They haven't realised that the Lord is going to die within a very short time. As far as they're concerned, they have come with him to an upper room to celebrate the Passover together.

And of course, as part of that, the Lord instituted what we call the Lord's Supper or Communion. Now I say the disciples didn't realise what was happening, but I think there was a real tension in the room.

[8 : 16] The disciples knew that there was danger about it, that the Lord was in danger from the religious leaders because he had exposed their hypocrisy and because he had stood up to them.

And so they were very tense. And one of the things that happened during the time in the upper room was that the disciples had an argument about which of them was the greatest.

That was one of the things on their minds. And I think that's relevant as we look at this incident here. Because the Lord Jesus was trying to teach them a lesson about greatness and about serving others.

If you went to a house for a meal, the custom was that the host would arrange for someone to wash your feet. Your feet got quite dusty walking around Israel and the host would arrange for your feet to be washed.

And that was something that was done by the lowest servant in the house. The more senior servants would think it was below them. And certainly anyone who wasn't a servant wouldn't think this was something they should be doing.

[9 : 24] And so the Lord Jesus come to this room and there are no servants. There are only the 12 disciples plus Jesus. And perhaps the disciples were thinking, well, who's going to wash Jesus' feet?

And maybe all of them were thinking, well, it's not going to be me because if I wash Jesus' feet, I'll have to wash the feet of the other disciples as well. And I'm not going to wash the feet of Matthew or of Thomas or of Philip because I think I'm greater than them.

They should be doing it, not me. And so you can imagine their horror when the Lord Jesus himself takes off his garment, takes the bowl of water and the towel and goes round and washes the disciples' feet.

That looks like the first few of them accepted it but when he got to Peter, Peter objected very strongly. And we'll look in a few minutes at that discussion between the Lord Jesus and Peter. But we're going to skip over it for the moment and we're going to think about the key lesson that the Lord takes from his washing the disciples' feet. The lesson about serving and being served.

[10 : 37] So the disciples hadn't been willing to do something that the Lord was willing to do for them. The one who was the master became the servant.

And Jesus says, I'm leaving you an example that you should wash one another's feet. Now I think as we look at this passage we shouldn't take it that we literally need to wash one another's feet. That's not something in our culture is normally done. We may do it to demonstrate our humility. I have nothing against that. People want to do it. But it's not something we do particularly to serve others.

Perhaps my dishwashing example is a little bit better from that point of view as something that we might do to serve others although I don't think it gets quite to the heart of just how demeaning washing someone's feet would have been seen to be.

But the Lord is giving us an example and he's saying you should follow my example and you should be willing to serve others. If I was willing to serve you then you need to serve others.

[11 : 44] And often you will serve them in unspectacular ways. I think all of us probably would like to be seen to be serving in public ways and to get recognition for it.

But the Lord says we also should be serving perhaps even more importantly should be serving when it's not seen when it's difficult for us perhaps even when it dents our pride a bit because we have a love for the Lord Jesus and that's reflected in our love for others.

Jesus said in Luke's Gospel the Son of Man did not come to serve but to be served and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Did not come to serve but to be served. And he juxtaposed that directly with his giving of his life. Not that it is on the same scale in terms of the sacrifice he made but serving and being served is really important to the Lord Jesus.

In 1 John chapter 3 John writes this This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

[13 : 03] If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them how can the love of God be in that person? Do you get the two verses that are connected so closely again here?

The one verse talking about the heroic we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. The other verse talking about the mundane the everyday seeing someone who is in need and meeting that need.

and it's really important if we're believers in the Lord Jesus that we are willing to serve others and we're willing to serve them in ways that we might not find very attractive and that might also not be very publicly recognised.

One other thing before we move on I talked about serving and being served and that comes out earlier in the passage in the Lord's conversation with Peter.

Peter was offended that the Lord should think he would wash Peter's feet and yet Jesus says unless I wash your feet you have no part in me.

[14:19] Perhaps I could talk to a particular group this morning of those whose natural inclination in the church perhaps in the home as well is to serve who don't need the exhortation to serve others because they do it and they do it with real love and real care.

And yet for you, for any of us in that position it is very important that we are also willing to be served. To be served by Jesus and to be served by others representing him.

Remember the story in Luke chapter 10 Jesus goes to the house of Martha and Mary Mary and Martha is really busy preparing the meal. Mary is sitting at Jesus' feet and Martha gets more and more upset at what's happening.

Eventually she says to Jesus, why don't you do something about this? Tell her to help me. And Jesus says, Martha you're worried about many things but one thing is important and that is what Mary is doing.

She is sitting at my feet learning from me. However busy we are, however much we may serve the Lord and we may serve others, it's really important that we spend time with Jesus, letting him minister to us and also that we let others perform their service and to serve us at times as well.

[15:48] Serving and being served. Second thing I want to think about is clean feet and clean hearts. And that is the discussion that the Lord Jesus has earlier on with Peter.

This discussion that seems to be about washing feet and having a bath but actually very clearly is about being clean or dirty inside.

Now the relevance of the passage from Psalm 51 that Lynn read for us earlier. Where David has committed a sin and he feels really dirty.

He feels that he is soiled inside and that he needs to be cleaned. Look at the language. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean. Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Now David had just committed adultery.

[16:52] Bathsheba had become pregnant and to hide the fact that David was the father he had arranged to have her husband killed in battle. So he was quite justified in feeling really dirty inside.

And there are some sins I think that make us feel dirty inside as well. Sexual sin whether with our body, our eyes or our mind may well make us feel dirty.

Addictions could make us feel dirty including addictive habits, perhaps perpetual dishonesty telling little lies repeatedly. These kind of things we recognise are wrong and they make us feel dirty inside.

But really all sin makes us dirty. Did you notice when we had the passage from Matthew 23 about Jesus talking about the Pharisees and the dirt that was in them?

What was it that made them dirty? It was greed and self-indulgence. Ouch. And then Paul in his letters.

[18:03] In several of his letters he has a list of things that characterise those who are living by the flesh. A list of sins. And among them there are many of the kind that we might expect to see there.

There are the sexual sins that society looks at perhaps not so much these days but looks at askance and recognises that they are wrong. But then there are things like greed and envy and loose talk.

Ouch. Because these are things also that all of us might be aware of in our lives but don't take too seriously. Paul says these make us dirty as well.

All sin makes us dirty before God and makes us subject to God's punishment. That's the bad news. The good news is that all of our sins can be forgiven through the death of the Lord Jesus.

There is none of us that is too bad to be forgiven. There is no sin that God is not willing to forgive because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross if we confess it to him.

[19:22] 1 John chapter 1 verse 7 says the blood of Jesus his son purifies us from all sin. Now in this passage clearly there are two types of washing that Jesus talks about.

There is feet washing and there is whole body washing. So Jesus says to Peter you must let me wash your feet if you want to be part of me if you want to be my disciple. And Peter says well then wash my whole body please Lord.

And Jesus says no if someone's had a bath they only need their feet washed. Now in this the Lord Jesus in talking about someone having had a bath is talking about us coming to him for salvation to

begin with.

Recognising our sin recognising the dirt within us and recognising it only by his blood can we be purified from our sins. It symbolises isn't it in baptism.

Baptism one of the pictures it presents to us is dirt being washed from the body symbolising dirt being washed from the inside as we trust in the Lord Jesus.

[20 : 28] So there's that once for all time when we come and confess our sins and trust in the Lord Jesus and have our sins forgiven. but our feet constantly get dirty or perhaps in the time of coronavirus we could say our hands get dirty we need to keep washing our hands regularly to make sure they don't become contaminated and Jesus says we need that kind of regular washing as well.

Yes we're clean inside through his death for us but we do get contaminated by society around about us and by our own sinful nature that is still in us.

So we need to constantly be coming and confessing our sins to Jesus and being renewed in our fellowship with him being made again completely clean.

A couple of verses on from the one I quote to the menisco 1 John chapter 1 verse 9 John writes if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

So I challenge us this morning have we had that initial cleansing through the blood of the Lord Jesus coming to him in repentance and faith being forgiven for our sins and if so do we have that experience regularly of coming to him confessing our sins feeling again the purity that comes through his blood and being restored to fellowship with him.

[22 : 07] One last point three times in this passage Judas is referred to. Very much in John's mind mind and in Jesus' mind is the fact that there doesn't really belong.

The other disciples ran aware of it at the time. As far as they were concerned Judas was one of them but in reality Satan had entered into Judas Judas was not clean like the other disciples.

And I think that's a very sobering thought for us. And we should be examining ourselves and saying am I one of Jesus' disciples?

disciples? Quite often when we preach we say if you're a Christian then here's a lesson for you if you're not a Christian then here's something you should think about.

And perhaps some of us when it comes to a bit that says if you're not a Christian we kind of mentally turn off and think that doesn't apply to me. But all of us need to examine ourselves and say am I really one of the Lord's disciples?

[23 : 18] Have I really got his salvation? 2 Corinthians chapter 13 in verse 5 Paul writes examine yourself to see whether you're in the faith.

Test yourselves. Now Paul is thinking that most of the Corinthians when they apply that test to themselves will decide that yes indeed they are in the faith they are Christians and will then conclude from that that Paul's ministry is valid as he says it is.

But he does envisage the possibility that there will be some who are not truly Christians that they're not in the faith that they haven't got salvation through the Lord Jesus and I would suggest to everyone this morning that we examine ourselves that we see whether we are truly the Lord's is our faith completely in him for our salvation for the forgiveness of our sins and if we can see it is where is the evidence in a transformed life in the behaviours in the love that we show to others examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith a basin and a towel serving and being served clean feet and clean hearts if we belong to the Lord

Jesus let's follow his example let's go and during this week let us serve others in any way that we can and let all of us make sure that we are clean inside clean through faith in the Lord Jesus and have clean feet figuratively as well that we confess our sins to him regularly and know again that experience of his forgiveness and of fellowship with him let's pray together and for a prayer I want to take the words of an old chorus and let's apply them to ourselves let's pray cleanse me from my sin Lord put your power within Lord take me as I am Lord and make me all your own keep me day by day Lord underneath your sway Lord make my heart your palace and your royal throne
Amen