

Exalting Jesus Christ

"A Living Lesson in Humility"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The word "humility" is perhaps one of the most misunderstood, and certainly one of the most misused words in the English language.
 - A. The Greek word for "humility," among other things, means: "to stoop low," and carries the idea of one person stooping to serve another.
 1. This is the very idea Jesus was attempting to convey when, in **Matthew 11:28-29**, He said, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*
 - a. Jesus described Himself as *"gentle and lowly"* – gentle and humble.
 2. This is also same idea of lowliness that's conveyed in another passage – this one written about the character of Jesus.
 - a. **Philippians 2:3-8** – The apostle Paul said, *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the*

interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

- b. Notice all the descriptive words and phrases that described the humility of Jesus: *"lowliness of mind... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... He humbled himself."*
- c. These are the marks of genuine humility – and Jesus displayed them all.

II. As we continue our series of studies through the gospel of John entitled "Exalting Jesus Christ," we come to the moment when Jesus stepped into the shadow of the cross on the night of His betrayal.

- A. This is the last night Jesus would spend with His disciples, and so He took one last opportunity to teach them a lesson that would become perhaps the greatest of all – "A Living Lesson in Humility."

1. In the thirteenth chapter of John, as Jesus celebrates the last Passover meal with His disciples, we see that Jesus is not seated at a place of honor, but assuming the lowly position of a servant.
 2. We see Him demonstrating to His disciples the true character and meaning of servanthood as He quietly sat about to wash their feet.
- B. Let's take a few moments to look more closely at the events as they unfold before us, and see what great truths we can learn from this living lesson on humility.

BODY:

- I. John's account tells us that the location for this last Supper was in the city of Jerusalem.
 - A. This occasion was the celebration of the Jewish Feast of Passover.
 1. Earlier on this day thousands upon thousands of worshippers had poured through the gates of the Temple into the inner courtyards where they would slew their lambs in preparation for the Passover meal that would be celebrated later in the evening.
 - a. And, now, as our story continues, Jesus is gathered in the solitude of an upper room with His disciples celebrating this most holy of all Jewish feasts.
 - b. It is here that Jesus instituted what we now call the Lord's Supper.

- c. From this time forward, it would be observed by His disciples in memory of the terrible sacrifice He paid for us to free us from the guilt of our sins.
2. **John 13:1-3** – *"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God."*
 - a. If you remember, just before Jesus performed His first miracle of turning water into wine at the marriage feast in Cana, Jesus had told His mother, *"My hour has not yet come."* (**John 2:4b**)
 - b. Now, on the evening when Judas would betray Jesus to His captors, John tells us, *"Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father..."* (**John 13:1**)
 3. His life and His ministry were coming to a dramatic conclusion. In less than 15 hours Jesus would be dead.
 4. And yet, this hour didn't come on Jesus and overtake Him unaware.

- a. Even before He entered Jerusalem as the Messiah on Sunday morning of this same week, He knew this would mark the final week in His human life.
 - b. And for certain, He knew that death was His destiny, and He knew that it was the Father's will.
 - c. He was as familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah's Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53) as anyone could be – because it had been written about Him.
 - d. John says, *"Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father... and that He had come from God and was going to God."*
- B. As Jesus moves closer toward the cross, He knows that every word and every action must be taken with great care – with deliberate intent.
1. **John 13:4-5** – John says Jesus, *"rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."*
- II. When we look at this most remarkable act, perhaps we wonder why the Lord would stoop to do such a humiliating thing on the evening before His death.
- A. Well, there are actually two reasons that prompted Jesus to wash the feet of His disciples.

1. First, Jesus washed the disciple's feet because they all had dirty feet.
 - a. Jesus used this occasion to teach them a lesson they would never forget.
 - b. William Barclay writes: "The roads of Palestine were quite unsurfaced and unclean. In dry weather they were inches deep in dust, and in wet weather they were liquid mud. The shoes the ordinary people wore were sandals; and these sandals were simply soles held on to the foot by a few straps. They gave little protection against the dust or the mud of the roads. For that reason there were always great waterpots at the door of the house; and a servant was there with a bowl and a towel to wash the soiled feet of the guests as they came in."
 - c. Other sources say, if a host didn't have a servant, he would take it upon himself to wash the feet of his arriving guests, or the first guest to arrive would wash the feet of the others who came.
 - (1). This act of washing feet was very important, especially when you consider how people sat around a table to eat.
 - (2). Since they didn't use chairs in those days, they would eat reclining on one arm, and with their feet extended out

beside them. And, if several people were reclining around a table, the feet of one would be directly behind the person next to them.

- d. Since there were apparently no servants to do this task, Jesus assumes the role of a servant – demonstrating that He had, *"not come to be served, but to serve."* (**Matthew 20:28**)

2. The second reason Jesus performed this great act of humility, and perhaps the most important reason of all, was because the hearts of all the disciples were filled with pride.

- a. As Jesus gathered His friends to celebrate this last Passover with His disciples, and institute the Lord's Supper, He also told them about His impending suffering and betrayal.
- b. But apparently, no sooner had Jesus said there was a betrayer among His disciples, they all get into a petty argument about who's greatest among them.

(1). **Luke 22:21-24** – *"But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed! Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing. Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."*

(2). It's as if they're all saying, "I can't be the betrayer because no one is more loyal to the Lord than me!"

c. Sadly, this isn't the first time the disciples of Jesus have played this game.

(1). **Luke 9:44-48** – *"Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.' But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying. Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, 'Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great.'"*

e. On this final night together, the hearts of the disciples were still filled with arrogant pride, and so Jesus needed to teach them one last lesson on humility. To do that, He washed their feet.

(1). Here they are – all twelve disciples of Jesus assembled together to celebrate the Passover meal, and all too

proud to wash one another's feet. So they all sit there with dirty, dusty, sweaty feet.

- (2). These disciples were ready to debate over who is greatest among Jesus' followers, but not a single one of them would fight for the honors of being first to serve their fellow disciples by washing their feet.

III. In the verses that follow, there are three wonderful principles about servanthood and humility that come from this wonderful example.

A. The first great principle is: Servanthood and humility are never announced; they're silently performed and may even go completely unnoticed.

1. Jesus doesn't say, "Okay men, I'm now going to demonstrate humility!"
 - a. On the contrary, He quietly sets about to demonstrate humility by His actions.
2. Jesus always abhorred arrogant, self-righteous, self-exaltation attitudes among men – especially of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - a. **Matthew 23:6-12** – When denouncing the Pharisees, Jesus said, *"They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for*

One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

- b. Greatness in the kingdom of God doesn't come from self-exaltation, but rather by humble servanthood – humbly serving others.

(1). **1 Peter 5:5-6** – Peter told first century saints, *"...all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."*

- 3. And so, Jesus demonstrated that genuine servanthood and humility are never announced, they are silently performed and may even go completely unnoticed.

B. The second great principle is that servitude and humility must be received willingly, and without the need to feel we must repay!

- 1. Turning back to **John chapter 13**, it appears – at first glance – that Peter was demonstrating a genuine humble attitude toward Jesus

washing his feet. But in reality, Peter was trying to disguise his own arrogant pride.

a. **John 13:6-7** – John writes, "*Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, 'Lord, are You washing my feet?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.'*"

b. But Peter refused to submit to this act of servitude.

c. "*Peter said to Him, 'You shall never wash my feet!'*" (**John 13:8a**)

2. It's almost as if Peter is saying, "These other disciples of Yours may let you humble Yourself before them, but you'll never humble Yourself before me!"

3. That's when Jesus delivers this most scathing rebuke to this proud apostle. Jesus says, "*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.*" (**John 13:8b**)

a. All along, Jesus had been trying to teach His disciples the importance of being a genuine servant to others, but they had all missed the message.

b. Now, it's as if Jesus is telling Peter, "If you don't learn this lesson on humility right now, you might as well pack up your things and leave. You'll never be of any use to Me!"

- c. It would have been virtually impossible for these men to give their lives serving Jesus Christ as their Lord – in preaching the gospel of Christ to others, and in ministering to the needs of the saints – if they never learned the meaning of genuine servanthood and humility?
4. Pride-filled Christians make very poor servants. They're always looking for people to do for them, rather than looking for opportunities to serve the needs of others.
 5. They're always complaining that no one did anything for them in their time of need, when they should be remembering all the times they failed to respond to the needs of others.
 - a. The Lord has no room for arrogant, pride-filled disciples who are always complaining that no one does anything for them. We aren't here to be served – but like Jesus, we are here to serve.
 - b. This is one of the reasons why so many Christians fall away or become inactive in the Lord's service – they're sitting around waiting to be served. And when no one cater to their need, they get offended and walk right out of the church.
 - c. But when everyone is serving, we don't have time to worry about whether we're being served!

6. The rebuke of the Lord stung Peter so badly that he immediately responded, *"Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!"* **(John 13:9)**
 - a. Apparently Peter was saying, "Give me a bath, then! Don't wash just my feet, wash my whole body!"
 - b. Understand, Peter wasn't being sarcastic. He was so shocked by the Lord's rebuke that he pleaded with the Lord to do whatever needed to be done so that he could remain a part of this inner-circle of disciples.

7. And so, the Lord replied, *"He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."* **(John 13:10)**
 - a. There are two very subtle, and yet very significant differences between the words "bathed" and "wash," as used by the Lord in verse 10.
 - (1). Like us, people in those days bathed in the privacy of their own homes before attending dinner engagements.
 - (2). But since the roads were dusty, their feet would get dirty walking through the streets on their ways to the host's home. So, when they arrived, they only needed to wash their feet – not take another bath.

8. In a spiritual sense, we're bathed when we are baptized into Christ – when we are immersed in water for the remission of our sins (buried with Christ in baptism). All the filth of this world is removed from our souls.
9. But, as we walk through life's dirty streets, we pick up some of the world's dust and dirt. But we don't need to take another bath (we don't need to be baptized again), we just need a little washing up.
 - a. That's what John had in mind when he wrote to Christians telling them **(1 John 1:9)**, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
 - b. John was saying we need to "clean up" occasionally – we need to remove the filth that accumulates during our walk through this world by repenting of and confessing those sins to God.
 - c. Otherwise, we can't have fellowship with God, and will ultimately be lost if we refuse to cleanse ourselves from these sins from time to time.
10. Returning to **John chapter 13**, we hear Jesus tell His disciples, *"you are clean, but not all of you."* (**John 13:10b**)

- a. The very next verse tells us why Jesus said this: *"For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, 'You are not all clean.'" (John 13:11)*
 - b. Jesus was obviously talking about the uncleanness that had already entered the heart of Judas – the one who was about to betray the Savior.
- C. But there's one final principle about servanthood and humility that comes from this passage: Servanthood and humility do not discriminate.
1. Jesus humbly sets about to wash the feet of every disciple – and since Judas had not yet left the upper room, Jesus would have washed his feet as well.
 2. If Jesus were like many of us, He probably would have found some way to avoid washing the feet of Judas. After all, none of us would want to humbly serve the very person who is laying a plot against us!
 3. But all throughout His ministry, Jesus attempted to teach His disciples that godly servitude and humility is not just given to those who we think deserve it – it's given indiscriminately to everyone.
 - a. That's genuine, authentic grace!
 - b. That's the way God deals with each of us.

(1). We are completely unworthy of God's grace (His unmerited favor), because, in a sense, we've all betrayed the Savior at one time or another.

(2). But God graciously cleanses us from all the filth of the world when we come to Christ in complete obedience.

c. God's grace is extended to everyone – regardless of how good or how bad we are – because God's grace doesn't discriminate.

4. You can be sure of one thing: Jesus also humbly washed the feet of His betrayer.

a. God's grace doesn't discriminate – and neither should ours.

CONCLUSION:

I. When Jesus finished washing His disciple's feet, we can only imagine the hush that must have settled over the room.

A. They were all in a state of shock!

1. The disciples were probably looking around at everyone's freshly washed feet and feeling a little shame that none of them had humbled themselves to do what Jesus did.

2. But I'm sure the disciples were probably trying to figure out why in the world did Jesus stoop to wash His disciples' feet?

B. According to Jewish tradition, when a great Rabbi (a Jewish teacher) was about to send his students out into the world, he arranged to teach them one final lesson; a lesson that would remain with them for the rest of their lives – one final, unforgettable lesson.

1. And that's what Jesus did here.

a. **John 13:12b-17** – Jesus asks them, *"Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. 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. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."*

2. No doubt, when Jesus said, *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,"* they probably thought He was going to say, "you also ought to wash MY feet."

a. But that's not what He said.

(1). Even the most pride-filled Christian would jump at the chance to wash Jesus' feet.

(2). But only those who were completely empty of pride would stoop to wash the feet of his fellow man.

3. Genuine humility and servanthood requires a great amount of inner strength to willingly humble ourselves and serve the needs of others.
 - a. And, that's the example Jesus left – that's the great lesson Jesus wanted His disciples to learn.
- C. Only after the disciples of Jesus had learned this lesson of humility would they be prepared to do two very important things:
 - 1 First, they would be prepared to evangelize – to, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* **(Mark 16:15)**
 2. And second, they would be prepared to lovingly respond to the needs others – even to *"one of the least of these My brethren."* **(Matthew 25:34-46)**
 - a. Unfortunately, the main reason so many of us resist complying with the Lord's command to take the Gospel to a lost world, or to care for the needs of even the least of all saints, is simply because we haven't quite developed the heart of a servant.
- D. From what Jesus taught His disciples about humility and servanthood, they would never again consider anyone so far beneath them that they couldn't stoop to the lowest person and share with them the message of the gospel of Christ, or minister to their needs.
 1. If we've truly learned the same lessons, neither will we.

2. Now perhaps you can better understand why the Scriptures described the humility of Jesus with words like: *"lowliness of mind... made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant... He humbled himself?"*
 - a. These are the characteristic marks of genuine humility, and as we said at the beginning of the lesson, Jesus displayed them all.
 3. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus..."*
- II. Is this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus?
- A. These lessons weren't for the purpose of teaching us about Jesus.
 1. They aren't merely lessons about who Jesus was and what He came to do.
 2. The purpose for this whole series of lessons has been to teach us how we can be more like Him!
 - B. Are you willing to set aside all selfish ambition and conceit, and in lowliness of mind, esteem others better than yourself, looking out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others?

1. People who do this have a Christ-like mind. Do you Christ-like mind?
 - a. Are you willing to humbly obey the Father's will in all things?
 - b. Are you looking for opportunities to serve the spiritual, physical and emotions needs of others?
 - c. Do you truly have a servant's heart?
- C. If you don't have this Christ-like mind, the best time to start is right now!
 1. Perhaps you need to start by taking the first step of surrendering your life to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
 2. But if you're already a disciple of Christ, and yet you've stubbornly resisted doing the will of God in all things, then you need to take the first step toward becoming a true disciple and servant of Jesus Christ.
 3. We would like to help you make that new start. You can be baptized into Christ this very moment for the remission of all your past sins.
 4. For those of you who need to make a fresh start as a true disciple of Christ, you can come this very moment confessing your sins out of a humble heart, and be restored.