

A summary of John 13:1-30

- 1. If our feet are not washed, we have no share or part with the Lord (vv.1-10).** Verse 1 says that Jesus loved His own who were in the world, and that He loved them till the end. The Greek word for “love” in this verse is **agape**, the divine love. How is such a love demonstrated? Through the example of washing the disciples’ feet. The disciples (you and me), are in the world. Satan, as we see in chapter 12, is the ruler of this world (12:31). Even though we, as disciples, are clean, that is, we have believed in Jesus and experienced baptism (represented by v.10), we still need our feet, that is, our daily walk, to be washed and sanctified. A very good picture of this is found in Exodus 30:18-20, where Aaron, the high priest, and his sons, washed their hands and their feet in the bronze laver of water located between the tent of meeting and the altar. This picture in the Old Testament is explained by Jesus in John 13:8, where Jesus says plainly that if we do not go through this same process, we have no part with Him. What is the significance of the washing by water? We need other Bible references . John 19:34 tells us that when Jesus was on the cross, a soldier pierced His side with a spear, and blood and water flowed out immediately. Water here refers to the release and impartation of the divine life, which we receive when we believe in the Lord. Titus 3:5 says that God has saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. This washing of regeneration not only refers to our initial regeneration (our new birth) but also to the continual experience of living a life of regeneration and renewal in our daily life and our church life. Ephesians 5:26 tells us that Christ cleanses the church (us) by the washing of water with the word. The Greek word for “word” in this verse is **rhema**, the word that speaks to us and touches us. Who are we? We are believers, disciples, perhaps even serving ones, washed by the blood of Christ, and regenerated by the life of Christ. We may serve the Lord, serve the saints, and take care of a lot of services, even visiting people. If, however, we are not washed by the water in the word, if we do not come to the Bible and experience the **rhema** word, we gain very little. Being in the church life is not a guarantee for gaining Christ. Moreover, if we are serving ones and do not come to the word, how can we wash the feet of others? We must realize how dirty we become by being in the world, in a realm usurped by Satan. The environment and the influence of the world cause us, again and again, to live apart from the eternal life that we have received. That is why we need our feet, that is, our walk, to be washed by the water in the word. When our feet are washed, we may, through the Lord’s mercy, be able to wash other brothers’ and sisters’ feet. Do we know them? Do we know their condition? We are not to judge or condemn them, but to know what they need, and lead them to live in the realm of eternal life.
- 2. We need a soft and receptive heart for our feet to be washed (vv.10-18).** The prerequisite for having the feet washed is to first have bathed (v.10). Yet Jesus acknowledges that not all were clean (vv.10-11), referring to Judas Iscariot. This may indicate that it is not the outward environment that causes us to be washed, but the condition of our heart. For example, Judas was with Jesus for three and a half years. We also may be in the church life for many years. We may come to all the gatherings. We may even offer many praises. However, if our heart is hardened, we cannot be washed. In fact, no one can wash us. If we come to the Bible just in order to understand it and say something about it to other people, we may be like Judas. No, when we come to the Bible, it is not for the purpose to speak to others, but for the Lord to speak to us. If there is no water (**rhema**) in the word, and nothing touches us, our heart may be hardened. We refuse to open to the word, and we refuse to open to other brothers’ and sisters’ speaking. We may not be involved in anything evil, but our heart is hardened. We close ourselves to the Lord’s speaking through His word and through other saints, and we are satisfied by living our Christian life and our church life in the same way as before. No one can wash us, and we cannot wash others. What is the result? Verses 18 says that “He who ate my bread has

lifted his heel against me.” The Chinese translation of “lifted his heel” has the thought of “kick,” a much stronger and emphatic meaning. Such is the result of an unwashed living. We may come regularly to the bread-breaking meeting and partake of the bread and the cup (“eat my bread), yet we may end up “kicking” the Lord or lifting up our heel against Him. This will trouble the Lord in His spirit (v.21). We often criticize Judas and wonder how he could ever betray the Lord after accompanying him for three and a half years. What about us? Do not we, time and time again, “betray” the Lord in our living and our actions, all the while thinking that we are engaging in good Christian services? Therefore, our heart needs to be soft, and we need to be washed over and over again.

3. Are we truly a slave of the Lord, or do we live as a comfortable servant of the Lord, respected and honored by all (vv.13-16;v.20)? The Greek word for “servant” in this verse is *doulos*, which means slave or bondman, someone who has lost his rights. The slave is not greater than his lord. The Lord is our example. He lived a crucified life, even before He actually went to the cross. Are we willing to be a slave, or do we prefer to live as an honorable and venerated “servant of God?” Some servants have a comfortable and even luxurious living. Does our living match that of our Lord? If our living is “higher,” then we are, in a sense, “greater” than our Lord. What an irony! If we come back to Exodus 30:18-20, we realize that before the priests could wash their hands and feet in the bronze laver, they had to first pass through the bronze altar of burnt offering. This means that we first have to know who we are. We are fit only to be consumed. We are not qualified to serve God. All our “serving,” and everything of which we are proud, must go through the altar (the cross). As the Lord took off His outer garments (plural), we also need to lay aside our outer garments, that is the things of which we are proud (our strengths and virtues), and also the things of which we are ashamed (our weaknesses and failures). Neither can satisfy God, and both must be consumed on the altar. Only then can we be qualified to be a slave. Such a qualification is precious, because it may enable us to live a life that is not above that of our Lord. It may also cause us to recognize other servants of God, who live as slaves, and receive them and their speaking (v.20). We need to treasure such servants of God, whom God sends to us. They are washed, and they realize that they are not qualified. Everything that they say and do goes through the altar (the cross) and the bronze laver (the washing of the water in the word). At the same time, we also need to exercise proper discernment to identify those so-called “servants” of God who are proud, who think they have something, but do not know the people to whom they speak, thinking that they can impart something to them. Such a speaking may not be helpful, and may in fact prove detrimental to the church. May the Lord give us such a discernment, and touch our living so we can exercise to live a life not greater than that of the Lord Jesus.

4. The word of the Lord is difficult to understand (vv.7,12). In response to Peter’s indignant protest against Jesus washing his feet, Jesus tells Peter that he (Peter) does not know now what He (Jesus) is doing, but that he will know later (v.7). The Greek word for the first “know” is *eido* (an inward knowing). The Greek word for the second “know” is *ginosko*, an outward knowing. When the Lord speaks to us, we may receive His speaking, and our heart may be soft. However, we do not know His intention or His purpose, but we still respond to Him. Later, we may know or understand what He said to us, but this may become outward knowledge. In other words, we may understand outwardly what He said, and we may even practice it, but in an outward way. For example, many practices in the Bible, including foot washing, baptism and the Lord’s Table, may become outward knowledge to us, causing us to practice them in a religious or outward way. In v.12, Jesus, after washing His disciples’ feet and sitting down again, asks them if they know what He has done to them. The word used for “know” is *ginosko*, an outward knowing. Even at this point, the disciples did not fully apprehend the import of Jesus’ act of washing their feet. Do we? Again, do we desperately come to the word until the water in the word flows and washes us?