

# Washed People Wash People

Bible Verses Mentioned: Exodus 3:20, Leviticus 10, Exodus 3:1-15, Revelation 21, 1 Peter 2:9

Good evening. Easter weekend, I love it. This is one of my favorite services of the year. I love it. I love the solemnity of it. I love what we get to reflect on. I love what we've been preparing our hearts for. It's the crescendo of the Lenten season as we come into this service tonight. I was preparing for this service. I was remembering a time when I was back in college. It was my junior year.

And it was during a time where most of my friends were going and doing semesters abroad, and I made the decision that I wasn't going to do that. Instead, I went out west and I signed up for this school, National Outdoor Leadership School. It's where you go and you learn how to be a mountain man. We spent some time out mountaineering and you spend some time caving. You spend some time winter camping, which is terrible, living in igloos. And then we spent time learning how to rock climb, which was one of my favorite things.

There were people that were at this rock climbing camp that were so gifted that you would look at them and I'm like, you could probably climb a mirror with boxing gloves and roller skates on. You are so gifted at this. And they would take us out to this place in Nevada, and it was this huge valley that had these massive cliffs on one side, and it was a couple of miles in between. And I remember sitting at the base of this cliff watching these jets do maneuvers in the center of the valley really slowly.

And they took us up, they roped us in and they took us up to the base of the mountain. We started to ascend this cliff. And it was really simple at first. It was kind of like climbing a staircase. Until we got to about 100 or so feet up, I don't know how high it was. I just know things look very little at the bottom and that if I fell, it would have hurt really bad. When we get up to this part and we begin to climb, it was kind of a rock face. And I had not done a lot of this in my life. And as I began to go up higher and my instructor was there, I began to feel myself slip.

Now, I feel myself sliding down the rock. And I did in that moment what anyone in this world would do. What do you think you do? You hug that mountain. You reach out your arms around it and you squeeze it. You dig your fingers in with all your might. And you cling tighter. The problem is, is when you start to do that and when you flatten your body against a cliff, you begin to slide down the mountain. It doesn't work.

See, one of the things they teach you when you're learning how to climb a rock is they teach you that half the battle in rock climbing is overcoming your natural instinct. Overcoming your natural instinct when the fear kicks in, when you're up in the air and you feel like you're slipping, every ounce of your being is telling you that you need to flatten your body against that rock and to cling to it with all your life. But the problem is, like I just said, the flatter you are, the more you slide.

And what they teach you is they say this, if you want to go up, you have to let go. And you have to push off. Because when you push off, that's where your body has space and your toes can grab hold of the rock. And your hands can find hand holds. Your body can relax and you can move forward. So there I was as I was stuck and I was hugging onto this cliff and they were calling out to me and there was no way I was going to let go.

But then my instructor said to me, he says, if you want to let go, or if you want to go up, you have to let go. It's the mountain man equivalent. If you want to save your life, you have to lose your life. And I'll never forget pushing back and feeling my toes grab hold and my body relaxing and looking out and I saw a jet eye level going through the valley and I thought to myself, this is wonderful.

I'm telling you that story because isn't that the way it is with us in the Christian life? That we, as believers, we're called to this upward motion. We're called into this process, this sanctification thing where we're on this journey, on this rock face that we go higher and higher. That we need to learn what it means to love people, love our neighbors as ourselves.

That we need to learn that we have to be selfless or more gentle or to be kinder or to love those who are not that lovable. But what happens when I get into that place, I find out when I do that, not for very long, I realize that I'm not really great at that. When I'm left to my own devices, I find myself that it's really a lot of effort. And I find myself slipping.

And much like on that rock, what I want to do is I want to cling tighter. I want to cling tighter. And the reason I do that is because I think to myself, yeah, I know I'm called to wash other people's feet. But my heart cries out, what about my feet? What about my needs? Like if I do this, like at what point does someone take care of me in this place? And I flatten myself against a rock and I feel myself slip and it becomes frantic.

And the question I have today is we read this passage. When Jesus is calling His disciples, we all know that you're called to wash feet. You all know that we're called to serve. The question that I want to ask is, how do you become the kind of person that wants to wash feet? How do you become the kind of person that wants to serve? Like we can go through the motions, but how do I get myself in the right place?

And the message of Easter, Jesus is ushering in this new kingdom. And it's this upside-down kingdom. It's this inverted kingdom where you die to live. You go down to go up. You surrender everything you are to inherit everything you were created to be. In other words, if you want to go up, you have to let go. In our passage today in John 13, what we see is Jesus is in the upper room.

There's a really familiar story. They've just had the triumphal entry, Palm Sunday. They think that Jesus is coming in. They are confident that he's going to take the throne. He's going to drive the Romans out. And Scripture says that in this moment, at this moment in the upper room, that Jesus knew his hour had come. It was the hour before his crucifixion, this thing that he had been preparing for his whole life. Verse one, it says that he had loved them to the end.

What that means in the Greek, it doesn't mean that he had chronologically to the end of his life. What it means is he has loved him with everything he had, with all that he was. And Scripture says in verse 4, Jesus stood up, and he laid aside his garment, and he wrapped a towel around his waist, and he began to wash his disciples' feet. Now, there are a lot of cultural implications of this here that shed a lot of light on why this is controversial. You kind of probably heard this.

During this time, washing someone's feet was probably the most humble thing you could do. In fact, it was kind of a degrading thing. In fact, it was so bad that only slaves could do it. And not only was it just slaves that could do it, but only Gentile slaves were allowed to wash the feet of someone because it was too degrading. But there's another part of this story about the foot washing. When you step back and you look at the Jewish culture and Jewish ritual, washing is such a huge part of what they do.

You find that anytime that you went into anything that is ceremonial, you find that washing is a central part of how they step into this ceremony. This has its roots. The first time you see this, it's in the book of Exodus. And we just read about the Passover. God leads Israel out into the desert and they're walking around and they don't know who this God is. He begins to reveal himself through Moses. They're following a pillar of fire. They come to Mount Sinai. He gives them their law.

He says, I am going to be your God, and you are going to be my people. And I want to be with you. In fact, I want to be with you so much that I want to dwell in the middle of your camp. I want to be right with you. I want to know you. The problem was, and the problem they had was this, is He was holy. He was a pure God. He was good, and the people were not. They were sinful. And sinfulness cannot come into contact.

It cannot come into the presence of such pure holiness, or it will be consumed. So God had a plan. And he had a plan, and he had a solution to this. And what he said is, I'm going to teach you, I want you to build this tabernacle. And a tabernacle, if you remember later in the New Testament, they had the temple. The tabernacle was kind of the mobile home version of the temple. It was a tent, and they erected it, and God gave them really specific instructions. You had this outer courtyard that was for priests to access.

And the priests would go in before they would make sacrifices. And then you had this inner courtyard, which was a more holy place. And then you had this inner sanctum called the holiest of holies. And the holiest of holies was a place where the Ark of the Covenant resided. And we've talked about this before. It was a place that was so holy. The only way I can describe it, it was a nuclear reactor of holiness.

That to come in contact with it at the wrong time and the wrong way or being the wrong person, you are incinerated. Leviticus chapter nine, there's two brothers, Nadab and Abihu, not very popular names anymore. These guys, they go in, God had just revealed His glory to Israel, and they're hanging out the implication of the Scriptures. They probably had been drinking a little bit. And they said, wait until God sees us. He loves us, kind of like you know that scene in Animal House.

And he goes and they walk in and God says, no, you're the wrong people at the wrong time, and they incinerate him on a ball of fire. And one of the funniest scenes in scripture is the brothers sitting outside like, I'm not going in to get them. You gonna go in to get them? So that's the picture of the holiest of holies. But God had a path for people. He said he was gonna raise up a priesthood. And in one year, there was one man who was the high priest that could enter in.

But the warning was this in Exodus 3:20, "They shall wash with water so that they may not die." And this high priest on the Day of Atonement, he would bathe himself multiple times over and over and over. And each time he would change his garments and he would wash again. And then he would put on a simple white linen garment, which he would have to

discard after washing. And he would go in and he would perform one ritual in the outer court, after which point he would wash his hands.

And then he would go into the inner court, and he would light incense, after which point he would wash his hands. And then he would prepare himself to stand at the holiest of holies and would wash himself again and prepare to go into the presence of God. And the one thing he knew is that if I don't do this right, this is surely my end. The presence of God is nothing to be trifled with. Now I want you to hold that picture in your mind, and I want you to imagine that you're that high priest.

And I want you to imagine that you are standing outside the curtain of the holies of holies. And you've done all the preparation, you've done all those days of washing, and you're wearing the linen, and you think you got it right, but you got this pit in your stomach. And you're sitting there and you're like, I know what's happened to those that have gone before me, and I just don't know if I'm doing it right. And you're standing there on shaky legs, and all of a sudden, the curtain moves aside. And from the Holy of Holies, there's a man that begins to walk towards you gently.

And you realize it's the holy God, the presence of God Almighty. And he removes his high priestly garments and he wraps a towel around his waist. And he sits you in a chair and he stoops. He bows low. And he takes your foot in his hand and he cradles it and he washes the dirtiest parts of your story.

And he washes the shame, your biggest failures, the hypocrisies, your inconsistencies, and he's doing this for one reason and one reason only so he can be with you. So he can be with you because he knows you can't wash yourself clean enough to enter with confidence and freedom into the Holy of Holies.

See, what's happening in that upper room is exactly what I just described. Jesus, the God of the universe. What happens to you and me when we come to Jesus? He has stepped from behind the curtain and he has come to wash us clean. See, what's happening in that upper room with Jesus, you see two things are happening at the same time. First, Jesus is providing a moral example.

And he's saying, hey, this is how my followers are supposed to live. I'm washing feet. You wash feet. You're not any better than me. Wash the feet. Great, but how does that penetrate my heart? How do I want to do that? More powerfully, what he's doing there is he's providing a picture of how his followers are to live and serve one another, but also what he's going to accomplish on the cross. He's going to wash us clean.

What he's saying is he's going to clean us inside out so that he can transform not just our position before God, but what we are. In that moment, we become what he says is a royal priesthood. Doesn't that sound amazing? See, the problem with that is this, I don't like being washed clean. I want to do it myself. You're in good company when you read the story, what Peter said.

Jesus comes to wash his feet. What does Peter say? He's like, "No, you're not doing this. I don't want to do this." And the reason Peter said that is Peter is like you, he's like me. We're committed to our own self. My flesh is so self-oriented. I want to clean myself up to be ready for God's presence. I want to be the one that earned that, which is impossible. It's impossible.

All that is us is when we do that, we just cling tighter and we begin to feel ourselves slip. And all that happens is we wear ourselves out and we begin to cling to the rock. We begin to hug the mountain of our own self-sufficiency. And it's just a matter of time before we slide and we fall. But the gospel, the message of the gospel is that God didn't lead of us scrambling at the foot of the mountain, trying to find a foothold. What Jesus is saying here is if you want to go up, you have to let go.

And when we let go, it's not that so we can find another part of our body to climb more efficiently with. No, when we let go, Jesus descends the mountain. He washes us clean, he gathers us in his arms, and he carries us to the summit. See, he has to do this because he wants to set us on mission. He wants us to go forward and wash the feet of others.

And in order for that to happen, Jesus knows something this about you and He knows something about me. And it's this. He knows that washed people wash people. Washed people wash people. When you've been washed by Jesus and you realize the grace that has touched the worst parts of your story, it doesn't fill you with pride.

It smashes your pride. Being washed by Jesus marks me with humility. Being washed by Jesus makes me not just ready to kneel, but wants to make, I want to kneel. Being washed by Jesus makes me ready to forgive, ready to love someone in the same way that I have been loved. Because in God's inverted kingdom, washed people, washed people.

That's how we move forward. And that is why we continually, and that's why we move through an Easter weekend. That's why we continually stare at the cross. That's why we sing hymns about the cross. That's why we say prayers about the

cross. That's why we read scriptures about the cross. That's why we wear crosses around our necks. That's why we elevate them in our places of worship, because we have to remember the way that we have been washed by the blood of the lamb. If we want to wash others, we have to know how we've been washed.

That is the call. We have to understand. We have to metabolize the grace of God before we will ever be able to pour it out to other people. So tonight, we're going to do something. For some of y'all, maybe never have done this before. And for all of us, it can be a little awkward. Let me just name it. And we're going to do a foot washing. Now you don't have to do this. This is not something we're not going to grab you and drag you forward and pin you down and wash your feet yet.

No, we're not going to do that. But I'd encourage you, if what you hear me saying, if the Lord stir in your heart, this is a way for us in the same way that this is not a sacrament, but it is sacramental in the sense that it is an outward expression of an inward reality. And we're going to do something that's going to depict something that was done for us at the cross. That we've been washed clean. And we get to humble ourselves by letting someone wash your foot. And if you've never had that experience, it's a very vulnerable thing.

And then we get to return the favor and Charlie explained how we're going to do this. And then you get to wash someone else's foot. This is the call of the gospel. And this is a chance for us to experience this in this moment in a small slice of what Jesus meant in that upper room. Amen.