

Living in God's Kingdom

Lesson 7: Serving Others

Notes for the leader: This is the seventh in a series of lessons about "Living in the Kingdom. This lesson focuses on the lesson Jesus taught his disciples by washing their feet during their last meal together..

Introduction

Jesus told people that the Kingdom of God is not a **place**. He said **that if you have given your life to God**, and let Him become your Lord and Savior, "**The Kingdom of God is within you.**" (Luke 17:21) This means **you can be part of the Kingdom of God** now, today. It's not something that will happen **someday**, it's something you can be part of **here and now**, if you're willing to let Jesus be the Lord of your life, and it lasts **forever!**

Jesus frequently used stories or parables to teach his followers about how to live as a member of the Kingdom. This lesson focuses on a different kind of parable — a story that Jesus **acted out** instead of just telling to his disciples.

This event took place just before the Last Supper. Jesus knows he will soon be arrested and crucified. He has chosen these men for the task of **establishing his church — his kingdom, his people** — at this time in history. He is trying to **prepare them for this tremendous job**, and to help them understand the way they must go about this job.

To understand what's going on, you need to remember that in those days, people walked from place to place, wearing sandals. It was very dusty, and their feet would get very dirty. When they arrived at someone's house, it was a **sign of hospitality and honor** for the host to have one of his servants wash the feet of his guests. This was a lowly job, **a job for a servant or a slave** — certainly not something that the host would do himself.

John 13:1-17

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, 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 a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize 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," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

John 13:1-17

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."

For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their 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.

I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Let's look at the following questions and see if we can figure out what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples.

***Notes for the leader:** Hand out copies of the Small-Group Discussion Questions to each person. Depending on the size of the group, have them break into small groups of four to ten. Make sure that each group has a capable leader, who can keep the discussion moving and well-focused. Make sure the groups understand how much time they have. 15 minutes should be a minimum. 20 minutes is better. Give each group a time warning three or four minutes before they need to reassemble as a large group, so they can bring their discussion to an orderly conclusion.*

Follow-up Discussion

***Notes for the leader:** The main purpose of the follow-up discussion is to make sure that each small group has grasped the main ideas of the study. You can skim quickly through the answers if it seems clear that everybody understands them. If not, pick a group that "got it" and have them explain the answers.*

If circumstances permit, it's a good idea to walk around and listen to each group discussion so that you know who "got it" and who didn't.

1. What important lesson do you think Jesus was trying to teach his disciples?

Humility. The kind of attitude it would take to build the church in the midst of a sinful world -- a real willingness to serve people, and to do whatever needed to be done to help them.

2. Why do you think Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet?

It "wasn't right!" Jesus was the **master**, and he shouldn't be doing the job of a **servant**!

3. Which takes greater humility: to give help to someone, or to accept help from someone?

For many people, it's harder to **accept** help, or even to admit that they **need** help. Peter was a **strong and proud** fisherman, and I suspect that he might have been a person like

that..

4. What does Jesus mean when he says that "a servant is not greater than his master"?

Jesus is **showing** them that he's **willing to be a servant**, and he's telling them that if **he's** willing to do it, **they** must be willing to do it, too. He wants to make sure they understand that their job is **not** going to be one of receiving great honor -- as we have seen in previous lessons, **that's not what the Kingdom of God is all about!**

This principle applies to us, too. If we're following Jesus, **we need to be willing to "be a servant"** when necessary. That's how his church works!

5. What are some ways we can follow Jesus' example? In our society today, what could be the equivalent of washing someone's feet?

There are many examples of "servanthood" jobs: Sweeping out the church building. Fixing clogged toilets. Taking care of sick or dying people -- emptying their bedpans. Changing their diapers. Sometimes it's simply being willing to give sympathy to someone who is discouraged, or in pain, or struggling with sin in their lives.

God's Kingdom — his church — is based on **love**. Remember: in biblical terms, love is not an **emotion**, it's an **attitude**, and an **action**. It's a way of relating to people, **of seeking to do good** to them, even if they aren't trying to do good to us. Jesus told his disciples that this was how people would be able to tell that they were his disciples, and that what he said was true: by the **love that they showed for each other** (John 13:34-35). This is still true today -- **this is how people will judge those of us who say we are followers of Jesus, and it's also how they will decide whether Jesus is "real" or not.**

To me, this is a tremendous responsibility, because it works the other way around, as well. Whenever I **fail to show love to someone**, people will notice, and **they will question not only whether I'm following Jesus, but also whether Jesus is "real."**

That can be a real challenge to those who are trying to follow Jesus inside the prison, because the "pressure cooker" environment keeps the heat on all the time. **The only way we can do this is with God's help**, and every one of us needs this help every day!

Notes for the leader: Before the group leaves, make sure everyone has a copy of the "Take-Home Thoughts" handout. This will help them remember the things discussed in the lesson. Some of them may also use these handouts to explain the lesson to a cell-mate or in a letter they write to their families. You never know how far the lesson materials may travel, or whose life may be affected by them!

Small-Group Discussion Questions

Serving Others *(John 13:1-17)*

1. What important lesson do you think Jesus was trying to teach his disciples?
2. Why do you think Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet?
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Take-home Thoughts About ...

Serving Others

(John 13:1-17)

Jesus taught his disciples important truths about God using "parables." Usually, a parable is a short, simple story – but during the Last Supper, just before he was arrested by the Roman soldiers, Jesus **acted out a parable** for his disciples -- a lesson they needed to understand.

In those days, people walked wherever they went, and the roads were dusty. As a sign of hospitality, the owner of a house would have a servant wash his guests' feet when they arrived. People would never expect the master of the house to do this himself.

But Jesus took off his robe and washed the feet of each of his disciples. *(John 13:1-17)*. They were astonished, and Peter protested to Jesus that this didn't seem right. But Jesus asked them, "Don't you understand what I'm doing for you?" **If I'm willing to do this for you, you need to be willing to do this for others!**

Jesus was entrusting these men with the mission of starting His church. He was showing them that in order to spread the Gospel, **they would have to be willing to act like servants to the people they were trying to reach**. Being a Kingdom Builder isn't about receiving honor -- it's about being willing to serve people in whatever way they need. It's about being willing to show God's love to people, even if they aren't lovable people! Remember, Biblical love isn't an **emotion**, it's an **attitude** toward people -- even people who don't love you. That's how we can even **love an enemy!**

People will judge whether we are really followers of Jesus by the way we show love to each other and to them. Every time we fail to show love, we are giving people an excuse not to believe in Jesus. We need to remember this when the "chips are down."

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