

John 13:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

Analysis

After that he poureth water into a bason (εἶτα βάλλει ὕδωρ εἰς τὸν νιπτῆρα)—The simple, practical actions emphasize the incarnation's concreteness. God in flesh performs physical, humble tasks. The water (ὕδωρ/hydōr) anticipates the water and blood flowing from Jesus's pierced side (John 19:34), symbols of spiritual cleansing and life.

And began to wash the disciples' feet (καὶ ἤρξατο νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας τῶν μαθητῶν)—The verb "wash" (νίπτειν/niptein) means to wash part of the body (especially hands or feet), distinct from louō (to bathe the whole body). Jesus later uses this distinction (v.10): believers are "bathed" (λελουμένος/leloumenos) in justification but need ongoing foot-washing (νίπτειν) for sanctification—cleansing from daily defilement.

And to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded (καὶ ἐκμάσσειν τῷ λειτίῳ ὡς ἦν διεζωσμένος)—Jesus not only washes but wipes—complete service, thorough cleansing. The towel He wore becomes the instrument of purification, as His own body would become the means of our cleansing (Ephesians 5:26: "the washing of water by the word").

Historical Context

Foot-washing in Palestine was necessary due to dusty roads and open sandals. Guests' feet were washed upon arrival, typically by household servants. That Jesus washes feet during the meal (not upon arrival) and that He, the Master, performs the task makes this radically symbolic. Peter's initial refusal (v.6-8) reflects proper cultural shock—this violated all social norms. Yet Jesus insists, teaching that participation in His cleansing work is necessary for participation in His kingdom (v.8).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does the water Jesus uses to wash feet point forward to the spiritual cleansing He accomplishes through His death and resurrection?
2. What is the difference between the "bath" of justification (being fully cleansed at conversion) and the ongoing "foot-washing" of sanctification?
3. In what practical ways can you follow Jesus's example of humble, servant-hearted love toward fellow believers?

Interlinear Text

εἰτα	βάλλει	ὕδωρ	εἰς	τὸν	νιπτῆρα	καὶ	ἥρξατο
After that	he poureth	water	into	G3588	a basin	and	began
G1534	G906	G5204	G1519		G3537	G2532	G756
νίπτειν	τοὺς	πόδας	τῶν	μαθητῶν	καὶ	ἐκμάσσειν	τῶ
to wash	G3588	feet	G3588	the disciples	and	to wipe	G3588
G3538		G4228		G3101	G2532	G1591	
λεντίω	ἄ	ἢν	διεζωσμένος				
them with the towel	wherewith	he was	girded				
G3012	G3739	G2258	G1241				

Additional Cross-References

Luke 7:44 (Parallel theme): And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Psalms 51:2 (Parallel theme): Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Genesis 19:2 (Parallel theme): And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

1 Timothy 5:10 (Parallel theme): Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

Genesis 18:4 (Parallel theme): Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

Revelation 7:14 (Parallel theme): And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Hebrews 10:22 (Parallel theme): Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Leviticus 14:8 (Parallel theme): And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp, and shall tarry abroad out of his tent seven days.

2 Kings 3:11 (Parallel theme): But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

1 Samuel 25:41 (Parallel theme): And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.

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