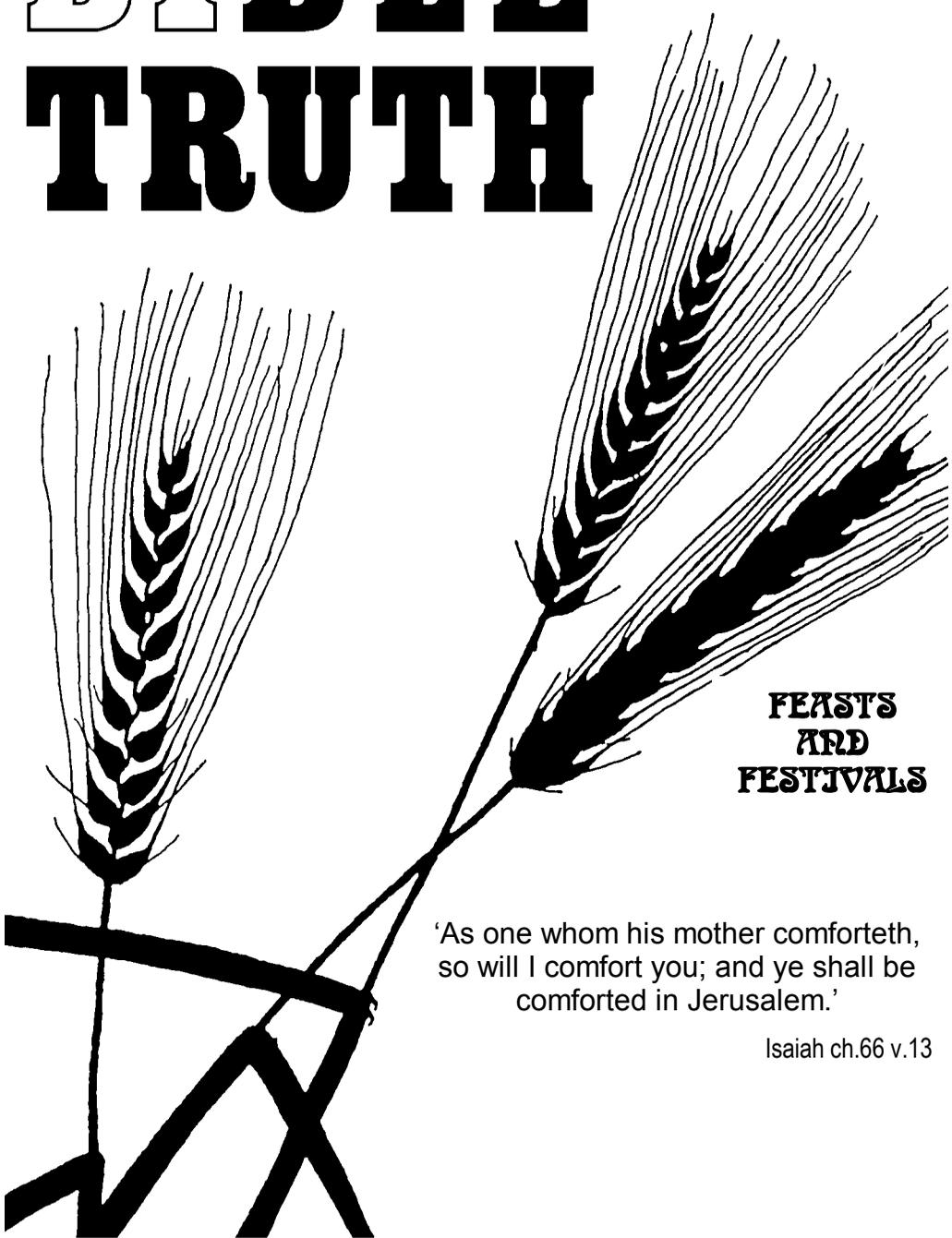


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**FEASTS
AND
FESTIVALS**

'As one whom his mother comforteth,
so will I comfort you; and ye shall be
comforted in Jerusalem.'

Isaiah ch.66 v.13

‘He ... Began to Wash the Disciples’ Feet’

Our Lord’s Lesson For Us All

by the late Rev. Dr Norman Court



The passage of God’s Word dealing with our Lord’s most touching act of humility, in girding Himself with a towel and washing His disciples’ feet, has always interested me. This scriptural gem is found in the Gospel of John, ch.13 vv.1-17. I would urge you to turn to it again after reading what I have said, and prayerfully digest its message for it is one of the most remarkable incidents recorded in the Bible.

When we remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is ‘... God ... manifest in the flesh ...’ (1 Timothy ch.3 v.16); that He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit; that,

‘All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.’

John ch.1 v.3

it makes the incident of our Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet all the more astonishing and amazing. That the One who fashioned the Universe in all its limitless vastness should have stooped down to bathe the feet of sinful men is surely unique. It seems incredible!

And yet, when we study the record of the earthly sojourn of our Lord, we realise that He came into this world as man choosing the meanest locality for His nativity. Not for Him the palace of the Caesars on Rome’s Tiber, but a manger amongst the lowly cattle. We see Him baptised in Jordan, His dear head bowed in prayer, a humble man. We picture Him trudging the dusty roads of Palestine, footsore and often weary, going about His Father’s business, and always preserving an unpretentious mien and manner. All He said, however, was with authority. What an example to us all!

We cannot help but love the lowly Stranger of Galilee, for that is how He appeared during His brief earthly ministry:

In fancy I stood by the shore, one day,
Of the beautiful murm'ring sea:
I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way
Of the Stranger of Galilee:
I saw how the man who was blind from birth
In a moment was made to see.
The lame was made whole by the matchless skill
Of the Stranger of Galilee:

And I felt I could love Him forever,
So gracious and tender was He,
I claimed Him that day as my Saviour,
This Stranger of Galilee.

In all His earthly pilgrimage He was humble, never seeking His own, ever giving the glory to His Heavenly Father. Yet, shining through that humility, as at the glorious Transfiguration we see Him as the Lord God Omnipotent. And again, let us think of the shame of the Cross on Calvary's hill where He died for our sins and transgressions. He died for others: for you and for me, and for everyone who has ever been born or will be born into this world until the very end of time. Think of it! Oh, the wonder of it all ! What humility! What a Sacrifice !

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to Heaven
Saved by His precious blood.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
Of Heaven, and let us in.

Cecil Frances Alexander's hymn sums it up, and Isaac Watts' words in another song confirm that when we contemplate the Lord Jesus our richest gain is obvious loss, and we readily pour contempt on all our pride. How wonderful He is! How much we need Him to teach us the simple truths of humility.

The Occasion

It all happened on that memorable night when our Lord and Saviour was seated with His followers at table in the Upper Room of a dwelling at Jerusalem. They had gathered to celebrate the Memorial Feast of Israel, the Passover, and it is evident that the Lord Jesus Christ desired to keep this Passover alone with His disciples. He had much to say to them. He knew that He was the true Paschal Lamb, and that on the day of Passover He would be sacrificed for the sins of the whole of humanity.

The Lord of all had come into the world to serve, to minister (Matthew ch.20 v.28). It had been the lesson of His every act, of His stupendous miracles, and it was evident in all His behaviour. He always took the lowest place, this One who alone was worthy, is worthy, and always will be worthy, of the highest exaltation bearing a Name which is above every name, that, at the sound of that Name, every knee should bow and every tongue confess Him in Heaven and on earth.

How different was He to those mentioned in Scripture who usurped authority and power; and in the case of Lucifer, who tried to exalt Himself above the very stars of God, and the proud Pharaoh of the Oppression and others whose pride led to their destruction. The Lord Jesus Christ, our Maker and our Beloved Saviour, never thought of Himself.

His whole earthly career had been one of utterly unselfish service; but it was evident that His followers, like ourselves today, had not yet learned the lesson of humility. It was our Lord's intention to teach this lesson by an example that would impress itself indelibly for always on their hearts and intellect.

It was after supper; after our Lord had dispensed the Bread and the Wine; that He presented this touching illustration. How he loved and cared for His disciples! How He grieved for them! His concern for them was uppermost in His mind.

There was '... a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest' (Luke ch.22 v.24). How amazing that, on such a solemn occasion as this, His last supper with his disciples, such a contention should arise and be carried on in His presence. They did not dispute His authority, oh no; but they were eager to obtain the premier position in His Kingdom. They were proud and had placed their own estimate upon themselves and upon one another, and

instead of regarding their brethren as more worthy, they had placed themselves first. What a sad situation! This sort of thing has been the cause of feuds and wars since the world began, and here were the most intimate associates of the Master indulging in it.

It was always customary in the East for a servant to wash the feet of the guests, and on this occasion provision had been made for this regular and courteous act to be performed. The jug, the basin, and the towel were all provided and to hand; but there was no servant. We can rightly assume that each one of those disciples was determined not to act the part of a servant in washing the feet of the others. They were too proud to do so.

Loving service and true humility constitute real greatness, and only the Lord Jesus possessed this. He rose from the table, and laying aside His outer garments that would have impeded His movements, He took the towel and girded Himself. '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.' What an impression this must have made. That it opened the eyes of the disciples we may be sure and they must have had hearts filled with shame and humiliation. How wonderful that Jesus never entered into any controversy with them over their desire for supremacy; but instead presented them with an example that would remain with them as long as life should last. The One who was Deity in the flesh; the One who had laid aside His regal crown and kingly robes of glory, took on Him the form of a servant for our sakes.

Our Lord went the round of His followers. Then it was Peter's turn. The great man registered a vehement protest. He was utterly astonished, and cried out, '... Lord, dost thou wash my feet?' Christ's condescension must have affected him greatly. He could not bear to see the Lord performing this act of humility, and exclaimed with some emphasis, '... Thou shalt never wash my feet'. You will have '... no part with me', our Lord told Peter. By this our Lord indicated that the cleansing was really symbolic of a purification of the heart as well as a lesson in humility.

Peter saw this clearly and surrendered the pride and self-will that had stood in his way. '... not my feet only ...', he cried, '... but also my hands and my head ...'. Just as feet once cleansed become dirty again so is it necessary for us to go to the 'fountain opened in the House of David (Jesus) for sin and for uncleanness'. We always need this – His cleansing Grace.

Have you been washed in the Blood of the Lamb? We have to keep on coming to Christ Jesus our Saviour for His cleansing power. The invitation is there for both saint and the uncommitted one, for both need to be freed of vanity and pride. May God help us to be 'clothed with humility', as Peter writes in his first epistle, ch.5, vv. 5-6, '... for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time'.

Our Lord lost none of His Godly dignity in performing the task of a servant. 'Ye call me Master and Lord', He said, 'and ye say well; for so I am' (John ch.13 v.13). No one was more highly-esteemed for this act of love than He who was equal with God, He to whom every knee shall bow.

It was said of Robert Chapman, that no task was too lowly for him to do. On one occasion a gentleman who was his guest, having regard no doubt to his host's gentle birth and high spiritual standing, refused at first to let him take his boots. '*I insist*', was the firm reply. '*In former days it was the practice to wash the saints' feet. Now that this seems no longer the custom, I clean their shoes.*'

You alone know in which way you can exercise humility. Jesus gave us an example, that we should do as He did for His followers- And He concludes His statement with the words, 'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'.