

“...The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live...” (Ecclesiastes 9:3)

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before the high God?*

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;
and what doth the LORD require of thee,
but to do justly, and to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6,8)*

So shall it not be among you: the nature of true greatness and real power

Part 8¹

Ye also ought to wash one another's feet, for I have given you an example

John 13.⁴⁻¹⁷

⁴[Jesus] riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. ⁵After 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.

⁶Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, “Lord, dost thou wash my feet?”

⁷Jesus answered and said unto him, “What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”

⁸Peter saith unto him, “Thou shalt never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered him, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.”

⁹Simon Peter saith unto him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”

¹⁰Jesus saith to him, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.” ¹¹For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, “Ye are not all clean.”

¹²So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, “Know ye what I have done to you? ¹³Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

¹⁵For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. ¹⁷If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

Introduction to the series

Mine is not, of course, the only way to structure or understand the synoptic Gospels. But it is

¹ In this series of homilies, we will explore the topic of “The Nature of True Greatness and Real Power” through the following texts: Matthew 16.¹³⁻²³; Matthew 16.²⁴⁻²⁶; Luke 9.^{28-36, 44-45}; Mark 9.³³⁻³⁷; Luke 9.⁵¹⁻⁵⁶; Mark 10.³⁵⁻⁴⁵; Matthew 21.¹⁻⁵; John 13.⁴⁻¹⁷; Philippians 2.¹⁻¹¹; Revelation 5.¹⁻⁷; and (Matthew 27.³³⁻⁵⁰ // Mark 15.²²⁻³⁷ // Luke 23.³³⁻⁴⁶ // John 19.¹⁷⁻³⁰).

one way. And it is a way that speaks to me. Perhaps it will speak to you as well.

As I understand the movement of the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—approximately the first half of their narratives regularly report on miracles that Jesus performed in a very public demonstration of his greatness and power. Between the three synoptic Gospels, nearly 75% of the miracles traditionally identified as having been performed by Jesus (and over 80% in the case of Matthew and Mark) were reported in the first half of the Gospels.ⁱ

For example, in his book of roughly 24,000 words (in the KJV), Matthew records twenty-three traditionally identified miracles performed by Jesus. By the 12,000-word mark, Matthew has already recorded nineteen of them, leaving but four for the final 12,000 words. It is around the 12,000-word mark that Matthew arrives at Peter’s confession, “Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” with Jesus’ accompanying warning of his impending rejection and death, Peter’s rebuke of Jesus, and Jesus’ necessary rebuke of Peter as the latter demonstrates his misunderstanding concerning the true meaning and nature of Messianic greatness and power reflected in Jesus’ miracles.

These observations are more than a trifling bit of math wizardry. Peter’s confession represents a turning point in the Gospels, and, perhaps, in Jesus’ ministry. With this confession and rebuke comes a shift in emphasis and purpose. The second half of the synoptic Gospels’ arc contains far, far fewer reports of miracles. Replacing these reports of miracles are reports of Jesus’ attempts to help his disciples understand the true nature of the greatness and power that they accurately witness in his miracles. In addition, it is in association with Peter’s confession that Jesus speaks for the first time directly and openly of his looming rejection and death. He will, the text informs us, “from that time forth” issue predictions and warnings concerning his ultimate rejection and death.

Perhaps this Gospel structure represented a reality and necessity of Jesus’ actual earthly ministry. Perhaps the Gospel writers (or me) imposed the structure upon Jesus’ earthly ministry in order to teach a principle that they had gleaned from Jesus’ earthly ministry.

Either way, there is much to learn from this structure.

Here is one of the principles we can glean from the structure. It is the principle upon which this series of homilies focuses. It is a principle, I believe, that Jesus himself held and lived by. It is a principle, I believe, that he attempted to pass on to his disciples.

True greatness and power; the kind of greatness and power that God exercises is something completely different than what the world imagines it to be. God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings themselves possess and wield greatness and power, such as it is. Further, God possesses and exercises greatness and power very differently and out of very different motives than human beings imagine and expect that *He* does. Finally, human beings must resist and reject the world's false ideas of the nature of greatness and power and adopt those of God. Only by so doing can human beings possess even the slightest glimmer of hope for peace in this world and an abiding existence in the world to come. To exercise greatness and power in a manner contrary to God's manner is to invite chaos and sure annihilation and extinction.

In this series of homilies we make the same points over and over again. We do so in a variety of ways. Hopefully, the repetition does grow weary. But, the fact is, the world as it is today is proof positive that it has not heard or heeded our Lord's warning voice. The world continues to suffer under notions of greatness and power that can only be described as anti-Christ. So, apparently, one can't speak the words of God too often. One can't speak too often of the nature of true greatness and real power as it exists in God and as it must exist in mortals. And, of course, the word of God never, ever grows mundane, but remains always vibrant and lively and quick and powerful and discerning.

Finally, a reminder. What we are doing here is homily, not commentary. We cannot, then, leave it at explication and discovery. We must move to application. We hope that this series encourages the reader to examine their own attitudes toward greatness and their own use of power, such as it is. In addition, we hope that the reader examines the world around them; examines those who are thought great and who exercise power in their community, in their

church, in their state, in their nation—in their life—and hold them up against Jesus’ standard. Do they, imperfect as they are, strive to exercise power as Jesus exercised it and as Jesus taught his disciples to exercise it? If so, then praise God. If not, then they must be challenged to do and be better. If they refuse to repent, they must be rejected and we more skilled in choosing to whom we grant power.

Very practical and applicable, this series of homilies.

Introduction to today’s homily

Jesus spent the first part of his ministry demonstrating his greatness and power. His disciples saw and believed. With their confession of Jesus’ Messiahship uttered at Caesarea Philippi and events immediately subsequent to that confession, the disciples demonstrated their lack of understanding concerning the real nature of Jesus’ greatness and power. From that time on, Jesus attempted to clarify the true nature of his greatness and power in word and deed. With today’s scripture, time is running out. Jesus is inexorably heading for the greatest demonstration or greatness and power yet. This demonstration of greatness and power—his suffering and death on the cross—would offer the greatest demonstration of the *nature* of greatness and power. So, during his final Passover meal in the upper room, the mortal Jesus takes advantage of one of his final teaching moments to illustrate the nature of true greatness and real power—not only his, but that of those who would be disciples.

The washing of the feet

We wonder if the disciples, as they sat with Jesus and shared this Passover meal, still remembered the words that Jesus had only recently spoke:

“Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will

be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”²

Whether they did or didn't, Jesus took advantage of another opportunity to reinforce this message. He chose to reinforce his previous instruction, not with more words, but through a personal and intimate act. As they had been when the woman, “who was a sinner,” washed, anointed, massaged, and kissed Jesus, the feet were called into service.

Let us, with those first disciples, watch carefully as Jesus launches into action. First, Jesus rises from his reclined dining position and stands. All eyes are now fixed on him, curiosity readying us for what is to follow. We watch as Jesus slowly removes his robe and carefully arranges it on his divan. He seems to take more time with this than necessary, as if he is milking every moment for all it's worth.

The robe Jesus has removed might be removed if one is engaged in some type of physical exertion, especially in the heat of outdoors. So, while Jesus is by no means naked, but still clothed in a thinner linen garment, his actions in the present circumstances are unusual. Therefore, we are, perhaps, no longer lounging back quite so comfortably as before. Perhaps we are sitting up a little straighter and a little stiffer, as uncomfortable as we are curious.

Jesus now picks up a “towel,” wraps it around his waist, and cinches it in place. This “towel” appears to be some type of garment worn by a household slave when he engages in the menial service of washing his master's feet, other family member's feet, or the feet of those who enter the house as honored guests. This action, like those before, heightens our curiosity.

We now watch as Jesus, having retrieved a jar of water and a bason, pours water into the basin. With this water, Jesus begins to wash his disciples' feet. The disciples have, likely, washed their hands several times as part of the Passover service. But there is no record, or service tradition that would lead us to believe that their feet had been cleaned before or during the service. Thus, we can guess at their feet's state of cleanliness. The streets and alleys of the ancient world were often a cesspool. Literally. So, this washing of another's feet

² Mark 10.⁴³⁻⁴⁴

isn't exactly pleasant. Nor is it prestigious. It demonstrates a certain inferiority of position and character. So, given who Jesus is—Messiah in the mind of his disciples, God Himself by the testimony of scripture—what Jesus is doing as he washes feet filthy with the city's refuse is unexpected, certainly, but radical nearly beyond imagination.

How many disciples have already received this humble service when Jesus moves to Peter we do not know. But the humiliation Jesus is willingly suffering to perform this service is clear to him. So, Peter is more than hesitant to have Jesus come into contact with his filthy feet. He is mortified for both himself and for Jesus. This act is so far beneath Jesus. It is showing far too much vulnerability. It is exalting Peter too much. Peter will never be persuaded to accept such service. Jesus concedes that what he is doing seems incomprehensible, but there is cleansing power in his service. Those who will not accept this service “have no part with me.” He will, he assures Peter, make everything clear soon enough. With this assurance, Peter is ready to leap into a full body shower of water.

know ye what I have done to you?

Because water and washing were involved in Jesus' service, and because Jesus spoke of being “clean every whit,” Jesus' service becomes associated with rites of purification and removal of sin such as baptism. While there was, to be sure, a sort of purification involved in Jesus' service, it was not the sort of which we most commonly think, and had little to do with “rites.” Jesus hoped to purify the disciples' minds. He hoped to expel from their minds all the false and “sinful” notions they had inherited from “the world.” He hoped, especially, to expel from their minds all false and sinful notions of greatness and power. And he hoped to renew their minds with truer notions, especially notions of greatness and power. These truer notions originate in another realm and produce superior individuals and a more enduring society.

So, we should not be surprised that in explaining the service that he had just moments earlier rendered to his disciples Jesus made no mention of cleansing or cleansing rites. His service was intended by way of instruction and admonition. What were they to learn?

“I am a Master and Lord. You have understood this much. But, you have not understood the kind of Master and Lord that I am, the only kind of Master and Lord that can exist in any enduring way in this world or in the world to come. I am the kind of Master and Lord who does not lord it over others and expect to be serviced. Rather, I am the kind of Master and Lord who puts others before self and acts in service to others’ needs, however lowly and demeaning that service may look and feel. I care nothing for prestige or reputation. I care only to lift others from any sense of worthlessness to a sense of self-respect and their high value to God.

“Now, my service was not intended to lift you above others, but to remind you that you must be below others. This is true greatness and real power. If you really hope to be a disciple, you must act as I do. You must put away all the world’s false and sinful notions of greatness and power and take up the true and enduring role of servant.”

This is the “cleansing” that Jesus’s service intended to accomplish: a cleansing of false and sinful notions or greatness and power, of mastery and lordship. That’s the “renewal” that Jesus’ service hoped to institute: a new kind of greatness and power and mastery and lordship. A new kind of leader. A truer shepherd. An army of servants.

Ġf ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them

“Men are, that they might have joy.”³ We hear this quoted so often that we run the risk of corrupting it, turning it into a narcissists wet dream. Happiness looks little like that which the world so propagandistically advertises as part of its brainwashing campaign (See what I did there? *Brainwashing*? The world has its own “purification” rites and practices, traditions and theologies that compete for the hearts and minds of its inhabitants, create unholy societies, and are diametrically opposed to both God Himself and his enduring truths.).

³ 2 Nephi 2.²⁵

Scripture offers many suggestions for happiness. They often come in the form of macarism—a word taken from Greek meaning “an ascription of blessedness or happiness.” Jesus used this form in his Beatitudes: “Blessed are...” This “blessed” can be, and often is translated as “happy.” As Jesus came to the close of his earthly ministry and began his final descent into the hell that was the cross—a descent that would look anything but “happy”—Jesus sought to remind his disciples of the nature of happiness and that it did not look like what they thought it looked like. Happiness was not to be found in lordship or reputation, in being served and groveled to. Happiness was about being the least and the servant of all. It was through service to others that true greatness and real power was expressed and that happiness was found and experienced. It was through self-sacrificing service to others that one showed their true discipleship to Jesus, the Greatest and Lowliest of all.

Conclusion and benediction

It has been a long and difficult journey for Jesus—this God who descended from the wonderous glory of eternity to come to earth, take upon himself a tabernacle of clay, suffer as and even more deeply than man can suffer, and become in all things “like unto us.”⁴ He who had sat in the holiest place “between the cherubims”⁵ had traded in his glorious, luminous, white robe for a simple, drab homespun wool coat. On this, his final night on earth and a day before his greatest demonstration of greatness and power yet, he stooped lower still, trading his simple homespun wool coat for the simpler “towel” of a lowly slave; trading his pure, and spotlessly clean royal garment of perfection for a rag soiled by the putrid streets of humanity’s filth.

He did all of this out of love for us. He did all of this to save us. He did all of this to reveal the nature of true greatness and real power. He did all of this to reveal to a humanity tortured and hunted by death and extinction what an enduring life looked like. Gods live a life dedicated to the service and advancement of others, however inferior those others may be

⁴ See Hebrews 2.¹⁷

⁵ See Psalm 99.¹

and however humiliating the labor may be. This is the “work and glory” of God.

Those who will not accept this service from him “have no part with me,” he warns. Neither do those have part with him who will not accept the call to offer to others a service that is in the likeness of his. There can be no greatness, no power, and no happiness in this world and no greatness or power or enduring happiness in a world to come but through the adoption and practice of this cosmic truth. Greatness, power, and happiness in this world and enduring greatness and power and happiness in a world are found, not simply through service, but by *becoming* a servant. For eternal servants are the greatest, the most powerful, the happiest beings in the universe.

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;
and I shall keep it unto the end.
Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law;
yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.
Make me to go in the path of thy commandments;
for therein do I delight.
Incline my heart unto thy testimonies,
and not to covetousness.
Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;
and quicken thou me in thy way.”⁶*

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

⁶ Psalm 119.³³⁻³⁷

ⁱ Following is a breakdown of Jesus' traditional miracles along with their distribution throughout the Gospels. Because John seems to possess an agenda even more radically different than even the very different agendas of the three synoptic Gospels, I have and will focus only on those three synoptic Gospels in my analysis.

Miracle	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Water turned to wine				2. ¹⁻¹¹
Nobleman's son healed				4. ⁴⁶⁻⁵⁴
Draught of fish			5. ⁴⁻¹¹	
Man with unclean spirit healed		1. ²¹⁻²⁷	4. ³¹⁻³⁶	
Peter's mother-in-law healed	8. ¹⁴⁻¹⁵	1. ³⁰⁻³¹	4. ³⁸⁻³⁹	
A multitude of sick healed	8. ¹⁶	1. ³²⁻³⁴	4. ⁴⁰⁻⁴¹	
Leper healed	8. ²⁻⁴	1. ⁴⁰⁻⁴²	5. ¹²⁻¹³	
Palsied man healed	9. ²⁻⁷	2. ³⁻¹²	5. ¹⁸⁻²⁵	
Crippled man healed at Bethesda				5. ¹⁻⁹
Man with withered hand healed	12. ¹⁰⁻¹³	3. ¹⁻⁵	6. ⁶⁻¹⁰	
Centurion's son healed	8. ⁵⁻¹³		7. ¹⁻¹⁰	
Nain widow's son raised from dead			7. ¹¹⁻¹⁵	
Calming the storm at sea	8. ²³⁻²⁷	4. ³⁷⁻⁴¹	8. ²²⁻²⁵	
Man with legions healed	8. ²⁸⁻³⁴	5. ¹⁻¹⁵	8. ²⁷⁻³⁹	
Woman with issue of blood healed	9. ²⁰⁻²²	5. ²⁵⁻²⁹	8. ⁴³⁻⁴⁸	
Jarius' daughter raised from dead	9. ^{18-19, 23-25}	5. ^{22-24, 38-42}	8. ^{41-42, 49-56}	
Two blind men healed	9. ²⁷⁻³¹			
A possessed mute man healed	9. ³²⁻³³			
Man with "devil," blind & dumb healed	12. ²²		11. ¹⁴	
Feeding of 5,000	14. ¹⁵⁻²¹	6. ³⁵⁻⁴⁴	9. ¹²⁻¹⁷	6. ⁶⁻¹³
Jesus walks on water	14. ²⁵	6. ⁴⁸⁻⁵¹		6. ¹⁹⁻²⁰
Multitudes healed in Gennesaret	14. ³⁴⁻³⁶	6. ⁵³⁻⁵⁶		
Syrophenician woman's daughter healed	15. ²¹⁻²⁸	7. ²⁴⁻³⁰		
Many, including deaf & dumb healed	15. ²⁹⁻³¹	7. ³¹⁻³⁷		
Feeding of 4,000	15. ³²⁻³⁸	8. ¹⁻⁹		
Blind healed at Bethsaida		8. ²²⁻²⁶		
Peter's confession	16.¹³⁻²⁰	8.²⁷⁻³⁰	9.¹⁸⁻²¹	
Demonic son healed	17. ¹⁴⁻¹⁸	9. ¹⁷⁻²⁹	9. ³⁸⁻⁴³	
Coin taken from fish	17. ²⁴⁻²⁷			
Man born blind healed			11. ¹⁴	9. ¹⁻⁷
Crippled woman healed			13. ¹⁰⁻¹⁷	
Man with dropsy healed			14. ¹⁻⁴	

Lazarus raised from dead				11. ¹⁻⁴⁴
Ten lepers healed			17. ¹¹⁻¹⁹	
Two blind (Bartimaeus) healed	20. ²⁹⁻³⁴	10. ⁴⁶⁻⁵²	18. ³⁵⁻⁴³	
Fig tree cursed and withered	21. ¹⁸⁻²²	11. ^{12-14, 20-25}		
Soldier's severed ear healed			22. ⁵⁰⁻⁵¹	
	19/4 (23/83% before)	17/3 (20/85% before)	15/7 (22/68% before)	5/2 (7/71% before)
Synoptic 23/9 (31 total /74% before)				