

## John 13:2--15 – “A Parable of Two Ways”

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**Intro:** There are two ways that you can live your life on planet earth. You can follow the way of Satan or the way of Christ. I suppose this will not come as a surprise to anyone attending an evening service at BFC! But what may surprise many Christians in our day is that these two ways go far beyond the question of our eternal destiny. They reach as well into our way of thinking and acting toward others in the here and now.

**Proposition:** Christ calls His disciples to humble servanthood to others. Will you answer His call?

Our study tonight will revolve around three observations: (vv.2-5) A Parable of Two Ways; (vv.6-11) The Parable Misunderstood; (vv.12-15) The Parable Applied.

(vv.2-5) A Parable of Two Ways – John went out of his way to mention that Judas had already received from Satan the plan for Jesus’ betrayal. This detail is given to us to draw our attention to the contrast between Judas’ actions and Jesus’ action in washing the feet of His disciples. It is worth our while to examine the two ways of thinking represented by the actions of Judas and Jesus. Judas’ plan and desire to put that plan into action came from Satan, we are told. Satan’s plan is always to think of himself and to cause those under his influence to think first of themselves. Look at **Isaiah 14:12–14 - 12** *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’* Notice the way of Satan detailed for us in this explanation of his fall: five times he said, “I will...” concluding with “I will make myself like the Most High.” This is the essence of the Satanic way of thinking and acting and it is shared by all whose sins have not been washed away by the blood of Jesus. In contrast to this, notice the way of Jesus. Far from the pride demonstrated in Satan’s way, Christ’s way is the way of humility. He made Himself a humble servant, washing the feet of His disciples. This is best explained to us in **Philippians 2:5–8 - 5** *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Some have observed that this passage from Philippians perfectly mirrors the passage in John 13:

- Christ *“did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself”* – Christ *“Rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.”* He came down to earth to serve our needs.
- Christ *“taking the form of a servant,”* – Christ *“Poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet.”* He humbled Himself and became our Servant.
- Christ *“When he had washed their feet... put on his outer garments and resumed his place.”* Christ returned to heaven and resumed His place of glory at the Father’s side when He had finished His earthly ministry.

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The parable presented by Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet pictures Christ's whole ministry, from Glory to Earth to Glory, and contrasts it with Satan's way of grasping glory for himself.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] There are two ways of thinking and acting on earth: The self-centered way of Satan and the selfless way of Christ.

(vv.6-11) The Parable Misunderstood – Christ's humility shocked the disciples, and we see this in Peter's reaction to Jesus' servanthood. **John 13:6–11** - **6** *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?”* **7** *Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* **8** *Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.”* *Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”* **9** *Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”* **10** *Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”* **11** *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”* As Jesus pointed out, Peter simply did not understand what Jesus' parable meant, and his misunderstanding caused him to react in two ways: first Peter underreacted, then he overreacted. Peter's first reaction was to refuse Christ's cleansing: - **6** *He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?”* **7** *Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* **8** *Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.”* Peter's refusal was emphatic. Kenneth Wiest translated it literally from the Greek: “*You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never.*” Why did Peter react this way? Because he didn't believe that humility was a proper attitude for one so great as Jesus. We see this in Peter's first words: “*Lord, do YOU wash MY feet?*” What was he saying? “*Lord, you are the Master and I am your servant. How could this be right, that you, great as you are, would humble yourself and do such menial service to one as insignificant as me?*” The whole idea of God humbling Himself to serve lowly man's needs seems wrong to us, doesn't it? Perhaps because of our familiarity with the gospel it doesn't shock us as much as it did Peter. In any event, Peter's misunderstanding caused him to refuse Christ's washing, and Jesus quickly pointed out that that would be a fatal mistake, for the thing being signified by that washing went far beyond the matter of dirty feet: Christ was speaking of the washing away of our sins - *Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”* When Peter realized that refusal of Christ's offer would keep him from fellowship with the Savior he loved, he overreacted and asked to be thrown instead into the deep end of the pool! **9** *Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”* Having fallen off the horse on one side, his misunderstanding now led him to fall off the other side. But once again, Jesus corrected him: **10** *Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean.* What did Jesus mean by this? Simply that Peter had already been bathed, washed of his sins by putting his faith in Christ. He didn't need to “get saved” again. That had already taken place. All he needed at this point was to have his feet washed. Our sins are washed away completely the moment we put our faith in Christ, but as we walk through this world behind the Master we pick up on our feet the dust of this world and our fellowship with Him is hindered. This is pictured in the Old Testament by the experience of the priests who served in the Temple. When a man was ordained to the priesthood, the first

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thing that happened to him was that he was given a complete bath at the door of the Temple. He then was permitted to put on the priestly garments and go to work serving the Lord and His people. He never needed to take a bath again, but several times each day he needed to go to the bronze laver and wash his hands. Why? Because in the course of his duties, he got blood on his hands. In order to resume his service, this had to be washed away. In just this same way, you and I as believers are completely washed of our sins the moment we put our faith in Jesus and that washing never needs to be repeated. But as we serve Him in this world, we get blood on our hands – we incur guilt, and we need that guilt to be taken away so we can resume our fellowship and service with our Lord. This is why **1 John 1:9** says – *9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Notice the context of this well known verse: the verses preceding it make clear that the issue at stake in our cleansing is our continued *fellowship* with Jesus and each other. We’re not getting saved again; we’re just getting washed so our *fellowship* with the Lord can be restored. Contrast this with the way of Judas: *And you are clean, but not every one of you. 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.”* Judas refused Jesus’ washing. Not the washing of his feet. I’m sure he had a smug smile on his face as Jesus knelt to wash his feet, probably thinking to himself, “This is rich! He has no idea what I’m about to do to Him!” But Jesus did know. Judas’ refusal to let Jesus wash him, would prove fatal to his soul, separating him from fellowship with God forever.

Misunderstanding Jesus’ humility was embarrassing to Peter, but fatal for Judas.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The selfless way of Jesus’ humiliation brings cleansing and fellowship to all who are willing to receive it.

(vv.12-15) The Parable Applied – What was the meaning of this parable for the daily lives of Jesus’ disciples? Jesus explained it Himself: **John 13:12–15 - 12** *When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* Jesus’ intention for His disciples is that we also should lay aside our lives for the sake of others. In verse 7 Jesus had said to Peter, *“Afterward you will understand.”* At that moment, Peter couldn’t understand. Probably after Jesus gave this explanation in verse 15 Peter and the others still couldn’t understand. What did He mean by *“Afterwards”*? Perhaps He meant after Peter had denied Him three times that same evening. After Jesus had humbly submitted Himself to the cross the next day. After Jesus was raised to life again three days in the future. After Jesus had restored Peter three times beside Galilee’s Lake some days hence. It seems very likely that Jesus’ parable of humility made no sense to Peter and the others until *“Afterwards.”* After its final fulfillment on Calvary. You and I live in the *“Afterwards.”* What, then, are we to do with this? How can you and I apply the lesson of this parable? I can think of two ways.

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1) If Christ laid aside His pride, humbling Himself for the sake of others, we should follow His example and humble ourselves for the sake of those around us. Follow the example of Jesus: When He saw those who were hungry, He gave them bread. When He saw those who were sick, He prayed for their healing (and His prayers were always accompanied by power). When He was in the storm, He was the one who brought calm. When those around Him needed teaching, He explained God to them. Jesus humbled Himself for the sake of everyone around Him. You and I are called to this same way of thinking and acting, and His indwelling Spirit loves to help us live this way.

2) Secondly, beyond this general way of living, we also see here a call to help our brothers and sisters in Christ who get their feet dirty with the dust of this world. We are called to watch over each other for Jesus' sake. **Galatians 6:1–2** encourages us about this, saying, - **1** *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.* **2** *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* Part of the humility needed to wash each other's feet is the discernment Harry Ironside spoke of when he said, “If you are going to wash your neighbor's feet, you ought to be careful about the temperature of the water. You would not go to anyone and say, ‘Put your feet into this bucket of scalding water, and I will wash them for you.’ Ice water is just as bad.” What did he mean? He meant that harsh criticism that scalds, or cold, loveless words that freeze the heart are never appropriate when we're doing this work. Humility working in love is the right way to do the work of helping others get back into fellowship with the Savior. Our tendency is either to scald in anger or freeze in silence those who have the dirt of the world on their feet, but that is not the way of Christ. Wrap the towel around your waist get on your knees when duty calls and you'll be following the example of the Master.

**Conclusion:** There are two ways that you can live your life on planet earth. You can follow the way of Satan or the way of Christ. But since you have put your faith in Christ, why would you ever choose to live in the self-obsessed way of Satan? We have a great privilege. To follow Christ's example of humble service to others is to honor our Lord, bless those around us and nurture our own souls. Let's get busy washing some feet, for Jesus' sake.