

Jesus Took the Towel

#0663

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—January 30, 1959

You know we're told that it would be well for us each day to spend some time meditating on the life of Christ, especially what? The closing scenes.

"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself"
John 13:1–4.

He could have had the throne, dear friends, but He took a towel.

"After that He pours water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded" John 13:5.

"So 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?" John 13:12.

That is, do you understand?

"Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"
John 13:13–17.

Now, why did Jesus take the towel when He might have had the throne? Why did He, really? That's what we want to ponder over tonight. I am sure, dear friends, that if we have never thought of this before, there's a lesson in it for us tonight. But I believe that the greatest lessons, tonight, will come to those who have thought of these things most often in the past.

Only today, as I was meditating and praying over these things, it seemed to me the view of it came clearer and simpler and sweeter than ever before. And oh, my dear friends, If we can share together tonight in the view that Jesus had and the experience He had, it will certainly be an upper room experience. I pray that we may all enter into it.

He, the King of glory, the One before whom all the universe had bowed and will one day bow again, came to the last night He was to spend with His disciples. As He sat there with them at supper in the upper room, He took the cup. He girded Himself as a servant, and He served them. I ask again, why did He do it?

Well obviously, there was a need there. The disciple's feet were soiled. You remember all about that. My point is, friends, and don't miss the point, there was an actual need. But it was a need that called for some work: some very common work, menial work, humbling work.

And the reasons, the first obvious reasons, that Jesus took the towel was that He might wash the disciple's feet. You remember how it was in those days—they walked, they didn't ride, they had open sandals. Their feet became dusty and soiled as they walked along the miles. It was the customary thing for a servant to wash the feet of the guests who were at supper. But the disciples were poor. No servant had been provided. And one of the disciples *should* have taken the towel and the basin of water and gotten busy, shouldn't they? Yes, but none did. You know why.

Probably all of us, if we would be really honest with ourselves, could understand why they didn't do it. You know there are some things people run to get, but the job of washing feet is not one of them. And there are some other things like that.

There was no competition on this point. It was because there was a competition on another subject that there was none on this one. Luke says there was a strife among them as to which should be the greatest. Right there in the upper room, in the presence of Christ, they were carrying on that argument and that discussion. And with their eyes on that glittering goal of being first in the kingdom, they couldn't see the basin and the towel. But Jesus saw it.

And He saw in it, my dear friends, the opportunity to meet a need. The disciples needed their feet washed. They also needed their hearts washed. And in the towel, He saw the tool that would accomplish both in one experience.

We'd do well to note the simplicity of the method that He chose. He didn't say, "If I had a Russian bath or an electric light bath or a whirlpool bath, I might do something here." He didn't say anything like that. He took the very simplest of equipment, and I want to emphasize that, perfectly, deliberately. There wasn't even a faucet there, my friends. There was no bathtub, there was no plumbing.

You know, a great many people imagine they could do a great deal if they had something they don't have. The equipment most people need to get busy for God is simply something they don't have, whatever that is. But Jesus took what He had. He took the towel and the basin and the water. That's all He had. As He saw it,

that's all He needed. He accomplished His purpose. He washed their feet, and He washed their hearts. All but Judas, and he left immediately, you remember.

And looking into the faces and deep into the hearts of those men, He could say when He had finished that work of love, "Ye are clean, ye are clean." Their feet were clean; their hearts were clean.

Now, He did not stop there. It's says that:

"...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?" John 13:12.

"Do you understand what has happened here tonight in this upper room?"

And oh friends, I pray that it may happen again tonight in this upper room.

"Do you know" He said, "what I have done to you?"

Do you know, my dear friends, that that night was last night they ever strove for supremacy? Do you know that was the last night they ever tried to climb to get the higher position? It was the last night. It never happened again in the lives of those men. Something happened that night in the upper room. Oh, I say again, would God that it could happen tonight right here.

"Do you know what I have done to you?" He said.

Now He said:

"you call me Master and Lord..." John 13:13.

You call me the leader, and the teacher, and the director of this little company. And He said, that's alright, that's correct, that's true.

Mark you, Jesus had not abdicated. He had not resigned. He had not given up one whit of His authority. He was no groveling worm. He had no false humility or mock humility. In divine dignity, conscious of the authority, that divinity which was His, He took the towel.

Now He said, "If I then, your Lord and Master have done this, I want each one of you to do it. If I have washed your feet, I want you to wash one another's feet.

"For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" John 13:15.

Well, you say, Brother Frazee, "This is hardly the time of the year when we take up this subject. This is not the time for the quarterly meeting."

No, it isn't. It's well along to the middle of the quarter—some weeks since we had the service, some weeks since we will have it again.

“Why then study this? It is the Scripture to study when we have the ordinance of humility.”

Yes, it is the Scripture to study at that time. I wonder if it should be studied at any other time? What do you think? Was Jesus here speaking here merely of a ceremonial ordinance? He certainly was speaking of that. He was instituting a religious service, an ordinance. And from that day till this, even in spite of the great apostasy, from time to time, Christians have met together and washed one another's feet as Jesus told them to do.

But my dear friends, that is a symbol. And a symbol of what? A symbol of the thing that Jesus was talking about and acting out—sweet, humble, loving service. Doing things for other people that they need to be done. Doing them in a simple way, a tender, loving way and doing it, mark it, with no thought of remuneration, and no thought of position, and no thought of recognition.

That sounds something like medical missionary work, doesn't it? At least medical missionary work ought to sound something like that. Nearly a hundred years ago, God gave this people the towel. He put in our hands not merely a symbol of service but the instruments of service. And He told this people, “By love, serve others.”

That's the great purpose of medical missionary work. That is the great objective of the program of ministry that God has committed to us that we may accomplish what Jesus accomplished that night in the upper room.

So, let us study with it that in mind for a little while. I have mentioned the simplicity of it. You know we are told in *Volume 7*, page 215, that the more simple our methods in work for Christ, the more we will accomplish. And speaking of the closing work:

“The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness” *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 300.

Do you want to do something for Jesus? There's a basin on the shelf. There's a towel by it. There is something within your reach, simple and humble, that can be used to meet a need. A physical need, if you please. An actual, visible, tangible need. Of course, friends, it will take work. It will take humble work. But if love is in the heart, love will find expression in taking the towel. That towel beckons us to loving service. Oh, that it may find from us the response of the Savior.

Now, I think one of the most important things is to note what it was that Jesus was after. The goal of it all was to reach the heart and change the heart of each one of His disciples. Without this, friends, all our work is a failure. The towel that Jesus has committed to us isn't just to get people's feet clean. The fomentations that God bids us put on the bodies of weary men and women are not just to warm their skin or heal their diseases. Mark this—watch it—there is a spiritual ministry to be accomplished in all this.

It was very clear in the mind of Jesus. He knew what He was trying to do. In the washing of their feet, He was seeking to change their hearts. Did He do it? Yes, He did it.

I want you to notice something very practical about all this, friends. God intends that whenever you and I take the towel to minister to someone, we shall have clearly in our minds two things. One is to help them physically, and the other is to help them spiritually.

Let me read to you how did Jesus do it. In the first place, we are told that as He sat there at the table and He saw the condition they were in, the words that He was about to say never came from His lips. Infinite wisdom, my friends, was stopped by the selfishness of that group. Infinite love could find nothing further to say.

Do you ever find a situation where your words seem weak and powerless and ineffective? Jesus did, my friends. And what did He do? He didn't keep on talking, neither did He withdraw in defeat. He took the towel and washed their feet. He did the simple, humble thing to serve them, and love broke their hearts. And I want you to notice something, friends, that as He began to actually do something for them, His lips were opened again. I was glad to find this little statement here:

“Jesus, by His example, gave His disciples a lesson of humility. Having girded Himself like a servant, He washed the feet of His disciples...” *Spirit of Prophecy*, Volume 3, page 84.

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“...conversing with them the while in solemn tenderness. He, the spotless Son of God, stooped to wash the feet of His followers as one of the last tokens of His love for them” *Ibid*.

Ah yes, He talked with them. His words were stopped as He sat at the table. There was nothing more He could say. But when He got up and put aside His outer garments, and took the towel and the basin and began, first with Judas and then another and another and finally to Peter, and on around. Words—calm, sweet, soft, tender words came from His lips. His words were in harmony with His actions. They were blended in a beautiful duet, my friends, and the keynote was love.

Now I want you to see something very practical here. Because friends, this is practical, what we are studying, what Jesus did was practical. I'm going to notice something now from the book *Evangelism*. Oh, and as I read it, think of Jesus with the towel and the basin and the water in that upper room as He moves from one to another of His patients, and gives them their treatment, and changes their hearts. Now listen as I read:

“As the medical missionary works intelligently to relieve suffering and save life, hearts are softened. Those who are helped are filled with gratitude. As the medical

missionary works upon the body, God works upon the heart" *Evangelism*, page 517.

Oh brother, do you want God to work on some heart? Would you take the towel and work upon the body while the Holy Spirit works upon the heart?

"As the medical missionary works upon the body, God works upon the heart. The comforting words that are spoken are a soothing balm, bringing assurance and trust. Often the skillful operator will have an opportunity to tell of the work Christ did while He was upon this earth. Tell the suffering one the story of God's love" *Ibid*.

I think that's wonderful, friends, don't you? And when I found this the other day, I said, "That belongs in this study." Oh, that's wonderful, friends. What are we after than as we take the towel? Ah, we're after the hearts of men and women. That's what Jesus was after. He went after those hearts, and He got them. He got them with the towel, and He got them with the sweet loving words that came from His lips as He ministered to them.

And I repeat, friends. Unless that spiritual objective is clear and strong in our hearts, we are either simply doing humanitarian service, or we are doing some drudgery that we get paid for. God forbid that we should sink to either level, my friends.

Medical missionary work is certainly not drudgery. If it is, it isn't medical missionary work. And medical missionary work isn't just humanitarian service. If it is, it's not medical missionary work. Medical missionary work is serving others *from* love, *in* love, for love's sake, seeking to win them to Christ and to eternal glory.

And we are warned to keep these practical, mechanical things that we all must do if we are going to do medical missionary work. We're warned to keep them on such a high spiritual level that they result in the changing of the hearts of men and winning of souls. And we are warned that unless we do that, we had just as well close it up, my friends. Perhaps I ought to read something to get the import of it. Now, this is talking about the restaurant work, but it applies just as well to every other phase of medical missionary work:

"There is danger in the establishment of restaurants of losing sight of the work that most needs to be done. There is danger of the workers losing sight of the work of soul saving as they carry forward the business part of the enterprise. There is danger that the business part of the work will be allowed to crowd out the spiritual work" *Medical Ministry*, page 306.

You see, friends. Yes, we get so... I don't know what adjective to use, friends, or adverb. But whatever it is, we get so efficient, oh so efficient, with our man-made ideas, and so we set some people to work with the towel, and we set other people to work with the words of Scripture, the words of love. And somehow, friends, we accomplish the Devil's purpose in separating that which God intended

should be joined together in indissoluble union. I quote the words of Scripture, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." And God has joined the medical and the missionary work together, the health work and the gospel ministry, in union that is not to be dissolved, we are told. And it is as these lines of work are united that we may expect to gather the most precious fruit for the Lord.

Jesus got eleven out of twelve of those hearts that He worked for that night. Oh, let us pray that God will help us to get and keep this vision of what the purpose of the towel is. Jesus didn't degrade Himself in what He did, He humbled Himself, but He did not degrade Himself. He exalted the towel, and He has committed that towel to us.

Don't misunderstand me, friends. I'm not talking merely about hydrotherapy tonight, although I am certainly talking about hydrotherapy. I'm not talking just of nursing, although definitely, I'm talking about nursing. There are other towels besides bath towels and hydro towels.

Here's one here that I have had years of experience in using—the kitchen towel, the dishtowel. I had no sisters when I was growing up, and I was early given the opportunity of serving an apprenticeship in the use of the dishtowel. I thank the Lord for it, friends.

Do you love the towel? This towel and this towel, do you love it? Men today are spending thousands upon thousands of dollars in the endeavor to take the towel away from us, domestically, medically, and every other way.

Why? Well, you know how it is about the treatments. After outlining the wonderful, natural remedies that God has given us, the Lord's messenger says:

"...yet, these remedies are going out of date because their skillful use requires work that the people do not appreciate"
Counsels on Diet and Foods, page 301.

Do you appreciate that kind of work? Do you see in the towel the opportunity to serve, and therefore Heaven's invitation to join with Christ in the fellowship of ministry?

You know, we like to say that Jesus spent more time healing than He did preaching. Is that true? That's true. But you know, friends, He spent more time with the hammer than He did with what we call the medical missionary work. He had a hammer and a saw in His hands many more years than He dealt with the healing of the sick. Am I correct? Yes, you can read it in the Bible.

In fact, some people had so little comprehension of the reason that He was here in the world that when they were trying to refute His teachings, they simply referred to the fact that He was a carpenter. They put it in question form, contemptuously, "Is not this the carpenter?" "Why isn't He just that carpenter?" Yes, He's the carpenter.

I wonder why Jesus spent so many years with the hammer and the saw, the chisel and the plane? For the same reason, He took the towel in the upper room that last night. There are other tools that may be just as near to you as that towel was to Jesus that night, friends. It may not be a towel but a trowel that's calling you. It may be a shovel that's inviting you to ministry. Would you run from it, or reach out to take it?

Ahh, but somebody says, "Oh, anybody can do that."

"Well, you are not anyone, are you?"

"Oh, no, I'm somebody."

And that's our great trouble, friends. Anybody can take a towel and wash feet, but "anybody" didn't do it that night. So, the Lord of glory did it. Yes.

Here's another tool that I have served an apprenticeship with—the broom. I told you I didn't have any sisters. So, I had the opportunity of learning to sweep the floor when I was six and seven and eight. My mother was a church school teacher. She was busy, of course. And so, it was my job in my preteen years to sweep the whole house and mop it on Friday.

Well, friends, don't think that I'm boasting. God knows that I have a selfish human heart the same as anyone else, but the more I study these things, the more I love these simple instruments of service. And I can tell you honestly from my heart (I give all the glory to God) I enjoy taking a broom and sweeping a floor and getting it clean. I enjoy it now. And I'm still doing it. And I'm enjoying taking the shovel, this particular shovel (he holds it up) I was using yesterday to fix the road, and I expect to use it again.

Now, some of these tools I don't know how to use. I don't know much about brick masonry, but I have had a trowel in my hands and laid a few concrete blocks. But, friends, most of the complicated things that take skilled workmen I don't know how to use. I couldn't use a lathe; I don't know how to. I couldn't run the bulldozer.

But I know how to use a shovel, and I know how to use a broom, and I know how to use a hoe. You know what I'm interested in, friends? Don't misunderstand me, I thank God for all the experts that can do these technical things that we need to have done every once in a while, even to taking out an appendix or pair of tonsils or working on the plumbing or electrical system. We need the experts that can do those things. But, friends, the more I look at this thing, the more interested I am in helping young people and older people to appreciate the wonderful opportunity of becoming lovingly proficient and proficiently loving in using the towel and the broom and the hoe and the dishtowel. Because you know what's got to happen when that happens? Do you know what's going to happen, when that happens? Oh, let me tell you! For it's something *wonderful*, friends, you have no idea unless you already know. Something wonderful is going to happen as soon as you and I learn that lesson fully and demonstrate it in three dimensions.

Before I tell you what it is, I want to tell you a little story, and it's a true story, and I learned it just a short time ago from our good friend Wayne Watershouse. We were sitting at a table, and he told me about this.

In September 1950, he was returning from Europe with a group of students on the steamship, Volendam. Quite a number of students had been over to Europe that summer. Some of them traveling around, and some of them taking work at various universities. And of course, they were discussing various things. The whole steamship was filled with students and teachers. They were discussing various things, as I said, that they had learned.

Among them was a Japanese scholar who was a professor of oriental philosophy at Columbia University, here in the United States. And he'd been over to England for the summer there at Oxford University studying western philosophies. And in the course of the discussions on the steamship, as they were on their way home, these students got to talking with this Japanese professor, and as they were discussing philosophies, they asked him what his philosophy was.

Well, he said, "In order to be worth something, a religion or a philosophy must have the light of life."

Oh, they said, "And tell us what is the light of life?"

He said, "The light of life has the three L's—Love, Law, and Labor."

This is the Japanese professor, you understand, talking, who has the chair of oriental philosophy at Columbia University. And the religion or philosophy that's worth something must have the light of life. And that's the three L's—love, and law, and labor, and he says that they must be combined and blended or they're worthless.

Then he went on to show why anyone alone would be worthless. He said, "Love without law is mere sentiment, and love without labor is only a dream." "Law, he said, without love is tyranny, and law without labor is only a scrap of paper." "Labor without love," he said, "is drudgery, and labor without law is confusion."

[The train whistles so loudly that Elder Frazee says the following] Now mediate on that for a moment, while the train goes by, for the rest of the story.

Then this Japanese professor said, "I have been looking for a religion which combines all three of these—Love, and law, and labor. And when I find it, that is what my philosophy, my religion will be."

Ah, my dear friends, let me ask you something? Could you show him that? Could you show him that combination? And you notice my question is, could you show him that? I don't mean just tell him about it. Could you show him the light of life in which love and law and labor are *all* blinded in one experience?

And somehow as I heard that story, I thought of some otherwise men from the East, that nineteen hundred years ago followed a light and it led them to a stable.

And did they shrink back and say, “Oh, we are looking for a mansion, a palace, we’re looking at least for a good modern home where everything looks nice and efficient, and up to date, this can’t be it.” Did they? No. They knelt down, friends, and recognizing the light of life they worshipped and adored. And they opened their caskets, and the gifts began to come out.

Let me tell you, my dear friends, what’s going to happen down here in these closing hours. You can read about it in Isaiah 60. Some wise men are coming again when the star shines. Some wise men today are looking for the light of life. As to us, it’s written:

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” Isaiah 60:1–3.

What do you picture when you read that? What are you thinking of? They found it at Bethlehem in a stable. And today the wisest men of earth are yet to find in some humble home, in some little institution, in some individuals who devote their lives to the service of the towel, they’re going to find that glory which the wise men found in the stable of Bethlehem where love and law and labor are blended, my friends.

Could they find it in your home, in your life? Ah, may God make it so for every one of us, my friends.

You know, as I was thinking about this, this evening, you know what I thought about? There are three kinds of people in this world, three great classes:

One class are lazy, too lazy to exert themselves to do much. They just move along and get by the least way they can. I hope none of us belong to that class.

Then there’s the second class of ambitious folks. And they are willing to work and work hard either for money or for recognition. If they can get money, they will work their fingernails off, as the saying goes. Or they may do it for fame or for position, for recognition. If they can get some kind of attention, some kind of notice, some kind of praise, something, something, then oh, they’ll work and work hard. And they despise these lazy folks who have no get up and get.

Now there’s the third class of folks. And they are just as industrious as the second class, and they are just as don’t care about what happens to them as the first class. You know what I mean. That’s a rare combination. And the unconverted heart can’t understand them at all. The multitudes didn’t understand Jesus. They thought that a person that had all the ability that He claimed to have ought to be getting somewhere faster.

Listen. The wise men recognized Him in the stall at Bethlehem, but if they had come back 33 years later and found Him with a towel girded about Him washing

His disciples' feet, I wonder if any of them might have said, Well, is that all the further you have gotten in 33 years?

No, I don't think they would have, friends. But there were many who had that attitude. Oh, there are people—watch this point—they're willing to take the broom for a while if they can look forward to getting past that. They are willing to use the towel in their freshmen year, but at least by the time they get to be seniors, they ought to be beyond such humble, menial service as that. And certainly, when they graduate, nobody would expect them. They are supervisors now, you understand. And that's what's killing the medical missionary work.

I thank God, friends, and I must say this in truth, that I know some medical missionaries that could go out and get either the money or the fame and recognition of this world, but they have caught the vision of the towel. I thank God that there are men and women in this room tonight that have deliberately (not because they are lazy) turned their back on the race for position or remuneration. They have deliberately set themselves to be busy about one thing—serving others for love's sake in order to win the hearts of men for Christ.

And I repeat that when you and I, all of us, catch that vision and that spirit, the light that glowed on the hills of Bethlehem will fill this earth with glory, and the Loud Cry will be upon us. Read about it in *Christ's Object Lessons*. We are told there concerning the loud cry:

“The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love” *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 415.

We are told that, quoting Isaiah 58, that it's practical ministry that will reveal that love. That's why everyone today is called to be a medical missionary.

May we bow our heads and pray. Our heavenly Father, give us the eyes that discern in a stable the light of the universe, tabernacling with men. Give us hearts that can see in an upper room in a towel and a basin the tools that will accomplish the miracle of the ages—the changing of human hearts by loving ministry to the body. Teach us to see in these experiences not the transition labors of students, merely as they strive for something beyond. Oh, teach us rather to see in these tools the equipment with which to fill our life work and accomplish our life's objective.

Teach us, like Jesus, to come not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give our lives for others. In Jesus' sweet and precious name, amen.

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