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## The Secret to Happiness

John 13:2-17

**Intro:** We have made our way through most of the holiday season for 2018. There's only one more left to tackle. Is it the last holiday of 2018 or the first of 2019? Either way you look at it, we still have one more to go: New Year's Day. Of course, the proper greeting for this holiday is a wish for a happy New Year! That's what we all desire, that this coming year will be a little better than the last; and we wish the same for the next person too! It's only natural and right, for how happy could someone really be if everyone else around them is miserable?

If you took a poll, I'd be willing to guess that most people today would say that their #1 desire was to be happy. Now, they might not declare it in so many words. Some might say they want to be rich; others may say they want to be famous; still others might say they just want to be loved. Though expressed in different terms, the underlying basis in each reply is simply the desire to find happiness, no matter how or in what way they imagine it to be attained.

The problem with this is that happiness is not easily achieved tho we may seek for it with all our heart, mind and strength. In fact, here in America, the privilege of seeking happiness is declared to be one of our inalienable rights. No one can guarantee the achievement of happiness. That's why the founding fathers wisely defined those rights as "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Liberty can be guaranteed and so can life, to a certain degree; but not happiness. Only the right to *pursue happiness* can be guaranteed to an individual.

So, how do we pursue happiness? The world offers plenty of options, depending on your preference. Some hope to find happiness by acquiring wealth or gaining fame or achieving some measure of political power only to find they have wasted their lives and have missed the mark. Wealthy people are often miserable; plenty of famous people commit suicide and politicians are, well...politicians. The world offers plenty of options but none are truly satisfying.

If you desire to find happiness in 2019 (and who doesn't), then you should take note of the words spoken by Jesus at the end of our text. They were spoken over 2000 years ago and they contain a clue for finding true happiness. But, before we dive into the secret, we must first consider the peculiar activity Jesus engages in during the Last Supper. It was an act so surprising that it left His disciples speechless, at least most of them. But it also serves as a living parable that illustrates the spiritual principle that Jesus will share as the secret to finding true and abiding happiness.

**2-15**- This is the last full night that Jesus will spend with His disciples before His crucifixion and He still has many things He wants to teach them. But, in their present state of mind, Jesus didn't begin teaching them with words that might have been missed; He began instead by performing 2 incredibly significant actions: washing the disciple's feet and giving the bread to Judas. Why did Jesus perform these actions? Like any good public speaker standing before a distracted audience, before He could teach them anything, Jesus had to get their attention.

On this occasion, the disciples were, shall we say, preoccupied. John's already told us that they were terrified of the religious leaders; they believed Jesus was about to be arrested, and they were afraid He would die and they would die with Him. Or worse, that He would be taken and they would be left alone. Nothing in their present circumstances prepared them to listen to and receive His teaching at that moment. So Jesus acted boldly to get their attention.

The 1<sup>st</sup> action in **ch13** is Jesus washing the disciple's feet. But, as John tells the story, he draws our attention, first and foremost, to the contrast between Judas, who was moved by Satan, and Jesus, who was motivated solely by love, by His knowledge of the Father and His unique relationship with the Father (**2-3**). Here we have the humility of Jesus, who washed the disciple's feet vs. the pride of Judas. In Jesus, we have faithfulness to the end (**1b**) vs. the treachery and betrayal of Judas. And, just in case we miss the most important point, John also mentions the devil so that we would understand that the real contrast is a cosmic one; it's actually between Satan and God.

Satan's way, as vividly described in **Isa 14**, it's simply personal advancement at the expense of others, in this case at the expense of God

(12-14). The ultimate consequence of this satanic desire is destruction (15). In contrast, the way of God is revealed to us in Phil 2:5-8. The result of this course of action is honor for Jesus and blessing for those who are His own (vv. 9-11). Satan, like Judas after him, said, "I will think of myself first and the first thing I will seek is my own advancement." God says, "You will actually go down to defeat." In contrast, Jesus said, "I will surrender My life for My brethren." God's response is, "You will be honored and will be a great blessing to many."

The next thing we should notice is Jesus' motivation for washing the disciple's feet. John says there were 3 things on Jesus' mind as He did this. 1<sup>st</sup>) He knew the Father had put all things under His power = His divine authority. 2<sup>nd</sup>) He knew He had come from God = His divine origin. 3<sup>rd</sup>) He knew He was returning to God = His future glory! This assures us that Jesus didn't wash the disciple's feet because He forgot who He was and where He was going. On the contrary, He was fully conscious that He was God. In fact, it was because He was God and because He wished to act as God that He chose to humble Himself in this dramatic and instructive way.

Now we can start to appreciate the significance of what Jesus is doing here. This is clearly more than just a lesson in humility. By this action, Jesus was actually giving a dramatic illustration of His entire ministry. He was deliberately working out a living parable for the instruction of the 12. He's dramatizing for them the true character of His ministry. He was showing them through this action what He'd come into this world to do, what He would send them out to do.

We can better see the meaning of the parable by comparing it to the passage we just read in Philippians. 1<sup>st</sup>, John says Jesus rose from supper. He had already done this in a much greater way when He rose from His throne in glory to come into this world. 2<sup>nd</sup>, He laid aside His garments. Paul says when Jesus came into the world He laid aside His glory so He could appear as a true man. Next, He took a towel and girded Himself. This was the garb of a servant, a role that He took upon Himself. Finally, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and in a few short hours He would pour out His blood for the washing away of human sin by the atonement.

To see the end of the parable we need only skip over to v12, as one author paraphrases, "When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. . ." In the same way, Jesus is now highly

exalted. Or, as [Heb 1:3b](#) puts it, “when He had by Himself purged our sin, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.”

The spiritual nature of this parable is made evident in another way also. As Jesus laid aside His clothes and began to wash their feet; it appears the disciples were struck speechless by the absurdity of it: all except one. Peter always has to say something. On the surface, it seems like Peter is being quite magnanimous by refusing to let Jesus wash his feet but, in fact, Peter’s refusal is quite contradictory. It seems Peter is humble enough to recognize the absurdity of having Jesus wash his feet but not humble enough to refrain from telling his Master what He can or can’t do! The Lord’s response in [vs8](#) causes Peter to do an about face, but even in this, he is wrong. His answer in [v9](#) comes from his own self-will. Peter is reluctant to let Jesus do what He wants. He prefers to dictate the terms to Jesus.

Peter is off base in all this but what is Jesus referring to in [vs10](#)? Clearly, He isn’t talking about physical dirt but about sin and the need to be cleansed from it. He’s explaining that Peter’s already a justified person and thus, only needs cleansing from the contaminating effects of sin, not a pardon from the penalty of sin. The imagery used is of a man going to a feast. He bathes at home, so when he arrives at the party, he only needs to wash the dust from his feet to sit at the table wholly clean. Similarly, those who truly belong to Jesus are totally justified, but they do need constant cleansing from the repeated defilement of sin so that their fellowship with the Father and Son won’t be broken.

Jesus says as much in [v8](#). The word part means participation, having a share in someone or something. When God “bathes” us in salvation, He brings about our union with Christ; that is a settled relationship that cannot be changed. But, our communion with Christ depends on our keeping ourselves “unspotted from the world.” If we permit and retain unconfessed sin in our lives, we hinder our walk with the Lord. This is when we need to have our “feet” washed. Jesus is telling Peter that he doesn’t need to be born again and again. To be born again once is enough. Still, as born again people, we need to continue to come to Jesus regularly for spiritual cleansing.

Of course, none of this truth applied to Judas because he had yet to be

bathed in salvation. Yes, Jesus washed Judas' feet but it did him no good because he had not yet been bathed all over. He had never been cleansed from his sin; he was still an unbeliever

**12-15-** Now comes the pop quiz! Does Jesus mean that we should begin instituting the ordinance of foot washing? No, He's talking about humility and the need for Christians to take a servant's role. If Jesus, our Teacher and Lord, has taken the servant's role for us, should we not, as His people, be willing to take the servant's role for each other? If the exalted Lord was willing to wash their feet then they ought to wash one another's feet. That was part of Peter's problem: he had a difficult time accepting Jesus' ministry to him because he was not ready to minister to the other disciples in the same way. Jesus is telling the disciples that they should carry about with them at all times a heart that is willing to perform the lowliest service for one another. In fact, no act of service should be beneath them.

Besides having a servant's heart, we're to follow the Lord's example as it relates to sin's defilement and cleansing. Washing the feet symbolizes the spiritual cleansing of believers who have fallen into specific sin. To follow Jesus' example, we must do as Paul instructs us in **Gal 6:1**. How should we restore a brother or sister who's fallen into some sin? We're to take the Word of God, which cleanses the ways of us all, and ever so gently apply it to our brother so that they might respond to it by the grace of God. Don't use scalding water or ice water and certainly don't dry-clean the feet. If you try to scrape the dirt off with your own ideas or opinions, you may take some skin with it! Instead, those who are spiritual should approach the other person in meekness and in love.

**16-17-** Now we've come to it – Jesus' clue for finding true happiness and if you'll notice, it has 2 parts. The first part consists of knowing certain things; the second consists of doing them. Obviously, both are important. It's the combination of knowing and doing certain spiritual things that leads one to true happiness.

So, what should we know to be truly happy? 1<sup>st</sup>) Jesus Christ is Lord. Not earth-shattering but the problem most people have in finding happiness starts right here. We usually have the whole thing backwards because we often act as if we are the Lord and He is the servant. Examine your prayers sometime and see how much time you spend telling Jesus what he should

do for you and how little time you spend asking him what you can do for Him. We say Jesus is Lord but we usually want to make our own decisions, choose our own way of life. When we do, we actually set ourselves as the center of our own spiritual universe; a role we're not adequate to perform.

Don't get me wrong, those who make themselves the center of the spiritual universe do get certain results. If they're selfish enough, they get most of what they want. If they're ruthless enough, they can keep others from taking it away from them. But in spite of this apparent success, the system is never quite accurate. Thus, the happiness that should result from these attempts actually eludes them. Also, there's no progress. In fact, things only get worse. Life only gets straightened out when we get ourselves out of the center and put Jesus in. Only He brings order to the system.

2<sup>nd</sup>) Jesus took a servant role. He is the Lord of glory. Still, He set aside that glory to be made like His brethren and serve them, even to death. This is what the foot-washing was all about. On the one hand, it shows Jesus in a servant role. On the other, it's a parable of His entire ministry, in which service was the predominate character ([Mt 20:28](#)).

The first 2 truths that lead to happiness pertain to Jesus: His position as Lord and His role as servant. The next 3 pertain to us. 3<sup>rd</sup>) We're not greater than Jesus. "We know that!" Really? When we prefer our own judgment over His or think we can manage without Him, we act the opposite of that. We must learn we can do nothing without Him.

4<sup>th</sup>) What's proper for Jesus is proper for us. How should I live? What should I do with my life? What should my values be? Where should I expend my energies? These questions are answered in Jesus: seeing how He lived, what He did with his life, what His values were; where He placed His energies. Meaning, He's our example ([15](#)).

5<sup>th</sup>) point is the most important of all. We have seen that Jesus is Lord, that he took a servant role, that we are not greater than Jesus, that what is proper for Him is proper also for us. It follows that we should also be servants. That is, we should all be ministers, for that is what the word "minister" means.

This is the most important point because it seems that service was the issue

of that moment. Just a few days before, the mother of James and John came to Jesus and asked Him to allow her to sons to sit closest to Him in the kingdom, on His left and right. The other disciples were a bit put out when they caught wind of this and Jesus had to take them all aside and explain to them that whoever wants to be first in the kingdom must become a slave. This lesson was soon lost on them since Luke tells us that right there in the upper room; another dispute broke out among them concerning who would be greatest in the kingdom. It was here that Jesus set aside his garments and washed their feet. The desire to be first, to be prominent is ingrained in the human heart and walls of the church are no protection against it. But, taking the servant role is a great clue for finding true happiness.

There's one more thing we should know: we are sent to be servants. Meaning, as far as God's concerned, the servant role is not optional. It's our assignment, just as it was Jesus'. We're to be servants precisely because this is what God's called us to be, just as He called Jesus. If He's done this, we'll never be fully happy in any other role.

Of course, this is all just knowledge. Knowing is important because you can't do unless you know. You must start with knowing but, knowing isn't enough! Many people know how to succeed but they still fail because they don't exercise their knowledge. Happiness doesn't just come from knowing these truths. It comes from knowing them and actually doing them yourself; making them part of your life style. Why is this so? Because in taking the role of a servant, you inevitably develop in your life the kind of character God can actually bless. The same character we find in the Beatitudes - "Blessed are the poor in spirit... blessed are those who mourn... blessed are the meek... blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness... blessed are the merciful... blessed are the pure in heart... blessed are the peacemakers... blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake."

Of course, none of those things really describe someone who is happy, in our estimation of happiness. Surely, it's the winner who's happy, the preeminent, those who are served. But, we're wrong. Our way doesn't work. It's only the words of Jesus in our text that can be trusted to bring true happiness into our lives, even if it's counter-intuitive. The theory of being humble and being a servant isn't worth very much at all. But, the practice of

being a servant is of immense value because it pleases God, it fulfills our calling and it brings blessing and happiness to ourselves and those around us. 😊