



Y. E. A.



FOOTWASHING

THE SERVICE OF HUMILITY

One of the services associated with the Passover is that of footwashing. Much symbolism is behind this act as in all other acts performed during that night. This article will hopefully prepare us for that service and the rest of the Passover service as well.

By Jerry Healan

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Yahshua knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in th world, He loved them unto the end. And supper being served, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him; Yahshua knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from Elohim, and went to Elohim; He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments; and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciple’s feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded,” Jn. 13:1-5.

Why did Yahshua perform this service for His disciples? What was the motive behind it? Yahshua’s own answer is given in verses 12-17, “*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? Ye call Me Teacher (Rabbi) and Master (Adonai): and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Master and Teacher, 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 master; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.’”*

THE LOWEST SERVANT

Yahshua had just performed a service for the disciples that was the duty of the lowest

servant of the households of that era. It was a service that was despised by all others. To be the lowest servant was to be looked upon with disdain from all others. The lowest servant was subject to everyone else. They had no power, the least rights and privileges. They were worked the hardest and longest and were given the most menial and degrading of tasks.

Notice Peter’s reaction when Yahshua came to wash his feet, “*Master, dost Thou wash my feet?’ Yahshua answered and said unto him, ‘What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.’ Peter saith unto Him, ‘Thou shalt never wash my feet.’” Jn. 13:6-8. Peter’s reaction reveals that he was both highly shocked and displeased that His own Teacher and Master was stooping so low as to wash his feet. He would never have submitted to such if Yahshua had not told him, “*If I wash you not, thou hast no part with Me,*” verse 8.*

There are several reasons behind Yahshua’s act that we must explore if we are going to learn from it and allow the same act to be magnified in our minds as we follow the example that He set for us.

HUMILITY

The first reason for this act was to reveal the humility that Yahshua had and that we also must have if we are to serve in any capacity at all. Consider Yahshua’s initial act to begin with which was described by the apostle Paul, “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in the Messiah Yahshua: Who, being in the form of Elohim, thought it not robbery to be equal with Elohim: But made*



Y.E.A.



Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the tree,” Phil. 2:5-8.

A better rendering of verses 6 and 7 would be, “Who, being in the form of Elohim, thought it not a thing to be clung to, to be equal with Elohim, but emptied Himself, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man.”

Yahshua was Elohim before His human birth. John writes, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Elohim, and the Word was Elohim. The same was in the beginning with Elohim. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made....And the Word was made (became) flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth,*” Jn. 1:1-3, 14.

This scripture is enhanced by another writing of John, “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that **eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;**) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Yahshua Messiah,*” 1 Jn. 1:1-3.

John 1:1-3, 14 and 1 Jn. 1:1-3 go hand in hand with each other explaining the real sacrifice and humility that Yahshua had, for He was equal to Elohim. He existed as Elohim before His human birth. He was in the beginning and the Father made all things through Him.

In one place the Jews sought to stone Yahshua because He made Himself equal with Elohim, “*Therefore the Jews sought the*

more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that Elohim was His Father, making Himself equal with Elohim,” Jn. 5:18. In another place it is written, “*Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Yahshua answered them, ‘Many good works have I shewed you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we stone Thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself Elohim,’”* Jn. 10:31-33.

Yes, Yahshua was Elohim. He was willing to empty Himself of the power and glory that He had, become a man and suffer an ignominious death for our sakes. That is a greater humility, a greater sacrifice, a greater love than any of us can ever experience for we are all men, coming from below, but Yahshua was Elohim, coming from above.

He was not only willing to empty Himself of the power, riches, glory and honor that He had as Elohim, but upon finding Himself in the form and likeness of a man, He humbled Himself and willingly emptied Himself of the human life for the sake of, and on behalf of those of us who were sinners from birth and were born with the death penalty already on us. His blood, His life was poured out for us from the tree of shame. He hated the shame and degradation that He had to bear for our sakes (Heb. 12:2), but did it willingly for the Father’s sake, plan and purposes, and our sake also. That’s real humility!

WHO’S THE GREATEST?

Another reason Yahshua instituted the ceremony of footwashing is that His disciples had disputed among themselves as to who was the greatest, “*And He came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them, ‘What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?’ But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the*



Y.E.A.



greatest, and He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, 'If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.' And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them: and when He had taken him in His arms, He said unto them, 'Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me: and whosoever shall receive Me, receiveth not Me, but Him That sent Me,'" Mk. 9:33-37.

Notice that the child had to be somewhat small for Him to take it up in His arms. Small children, especially babes in arms, are literally helpless. They cannot feed themselves, clothe themselves, walk, talk, clean themselves, etc. They are totally dependant on others for their own well-being. We must all realize that we are in the same situation when it comes to Elohim. Without Him we are absolutely nothing. It is His benevolence, His creation, His laws that function to our good. It is all very humbling when things are put in the proper perspective. We must continually look to Him for all our care and guidance, for our help in all things.

In another place two of Yahshua's disciples caused a stir among the others when they asked Yahshua for special favors, "*And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, 'Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.'* And He said unto them, '*What would ye that I should do for you?'* They said unto Him, '*Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory.'* But Yahshua said unto them, '*Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?'* And they said unto Him, '*We can.'* And Yahshua said unto them, '*Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom*

it is prepared.' And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Yahshua called them to Him, and saith unto them, '*Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many,'*" Mk. 10:35-45.

Yahshua had a problem on His hands. Each of His disciples were seeking to be the greatest, the chief, the head, the leader over the others. He had to correct them many times in His ministry. As long as He was with them, He could keep the situation in hand, but He also prepared them for His departure by instituting a service which would remind them of their status among themselves, that of being servant and bond-slave to others.

It is simply too easy for any of us to begin to exalt ourselves, seeking to be the prominent one among others. We can all exhibit the attitude that the disciples had in their day.

ELDERS, MINISTERS, AND BISHOPS

This should serve as a warning to any who desire to become an elder or minister. There is nothing wrong with a person desiring the office of elder, minister or bishop, as the apostle Paul writes, "*This is a true saying, 'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work,'*" 1 Tim. 3:1. The qualifications listed in verses 2-5, reveal one who exercises humility.

Paul also encourages, "*Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father, and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity,'*" 1 Tim. 5:1-2. He continues in verse



Y.E.A.



17, *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.”* And also, *“Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear,”* verse 19.

Elders, ministers and bishops are for the overseeing of Yahshua’s flock. They are to teach, lead, encourage and rule the flock, but not as the rulers of this world. They are for the purpose of serving Yahweh, Yahshua, the flock and others in this world yet to be called. They are not to be as the Pharisees, as Yahshua charged, *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do* (some use this verse to say that Yahshua gave authority over the assembly to the Pharisees, but such is simply not the case. A future article will be published on the Pharisees, which will explain what is meant here); *but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for One is your Master, even Messiah; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for One is your Father, Which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for One is your Master, even Messiah. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted,”* Mt. 23:1-12.

Yahshua set the example Himself. He never sought the chief places, nor the uppermost rooms (places) at the feasts, etc. He humbled

Himself and became servant to all. He was a leader by example. He emptied and abased Himself. He did not exalt Himself. The leaders of the assembly must follow the same example of leadership. In too many cases the example of the world’s leaders is followed rather than the humble, submissive, servant attitude that Yahshua exemplified.

Too many leaders trust in themselves and come to a point of thinking that they can do no wrong, but all leaders must consider that their position of authority relegates them to a place that will be more readily scrutinized and much more harshly judged upon Yahshua’s return. Other leaders seem to consider themselves above the law, and above reproach, but consider the offering for the office of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

Aaron and the successive High Priests were commanded to offer a young bullock for a sin offering (Lev. 16:3). This young bullock was to be offered before the goat of the sin offering for the sins of the people (v. 5). The bullock was for Aaron and his house (v.6). It was their atonement.

A bullock was considered to be the offering of highest estimation that could be offered. They were worth much more than a sheep, goat, dove, pigeon, or meal (grain). This was because the office of High Priest was the highest office that one could hold among the children of Israel. The priest’s lips were to keep knowledge and to teach the law out of his mouth (Mal. 2:7). Therefore, sin in a High Priest, was the greatest sin committed and required the highest offering. Such is the case with the leaders of the assembly in this day and age.

Elders, ministers and bishops should hold their office with great care, for to sin or practice wrongly in those positions is greater wrong and will bring the greater judgment and condemnation. Any who serve in these capacities should take great care to do so in humility, and in the admonition, and example of Yahshua.



Y.E.A.



The footwashing ceremony certainly applies to these men, and should remind them of the attitude of deep humility and servitude.

THE ATTITUDE OF LOVE

Another reason for the footwashing ceremony is for the purpose of expressing the attitude of love. This is the very first purpose that John gives for Yahshua's action, "*Now before the feast of the Passover, when Yahshua 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,***" Jn. 13:1.

Paul writes that the most excellent way and the greatest of all things is love (1 Cor. 12:31, 13:13).

Yahshua told the disciples, after He had washed their feet, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another,*" Jn. 13:34-35.

Yahshua showed the love and patience that He had with His disciples, for many times He had to rebuke them even calling Peter, Satan. He groaned within Himself for the attitudes and actions that they exhibited many times, but He continued on showing the kindness, patience and example that a true leader should exhibit.

Paul was inspired to write that love, "*...suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never fails...*," 1 Cor. 13:4-8.

The disciples who were seeking to be placed on Yahshua's right and left hand were seeking to vaunt themselves above the others. The others were provoked, because

they wanted the same places for themselves. Yahshua rebuked and abased them. Had the disciples not had a greater love and admiration for Him, then they would certainly have forsaken Him and gone back into their own ways and habits.

It seems that few people can handle rebuke in the proper manner of humility in this day and age. Everyone seems to wear their feelings on their shirt sleeves and when error is pointed out, they either have to strike back, driving many away from them, or they seek to separate themselves from them.

LOVE FOR ENEMIES

Yahshua told His disciples, "*Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour,' and 'hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father Which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect as your Father Which is in heaven is perfect,*" Mt. 5:43-48.

If the world applied these verses, would there ever be war anymore? If the churches and assemblies applied these words, would there be separations and splits?

The book of Luke also addresses the issue, "*But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you,*



Y. E. A.



do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to your again,” Lk. 6:27-38.

How many of us are truly able to apply these words in our lives today? We live in a world in which iniquity abounds and the love of many has waxed cold (Mt. 24:12). We all feel that we work hard for our possessions and what is ours, is ours, and no one else should be able to take them away from us. It is interesting that the words “wax cold” come from the Greek word “psucho” and mean; to breathe (voluntarily but gently); (by impl. of reduction of temperature by evaporation) to chill (fig.).

We are supposed to be zealous for Yahweh and His ways. In that sense we should be breathing hard for His righteousness, but in too many cases people are breathing hard for the physical things that they lust for today and only pay the remotest attention to that which belongs to Yahweh. In other words, there is no zealous, hard driving, hard working attitude of sacrifice that Yahweh’s people once had.

We must remember what Paul wrote, “*For when we were without strength, in due time Messiah died for the unrighteous. For*

scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But Yahweh commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Messiah died for us. Much more then, being not justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to Yahweh by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life,” Ro. 5:6-10.

We were without strength. We were yet sinners. We were enemies of Yahweh and His Beloved Son. Yet He set the example of loving His enemies. If we are to be His children, then we must do likewise. How many of us can really humble ourselves to apply this type of love? That is a purpose for the footwashing ceremony, to remind us of that type of love. Should we not seek to wash the feet of those whom we like the least, so that we can begin applying these principles?

Yahshua even set the example of washing the feet of the very one who betrayed Him, for He said, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.” For He knew Who should betray Him; therefore said He, “Ye are not all clean,”” Jn. 13:10-11.

THE FOOTSTOOL

There is one more thing I want to consider before I close this treatise.

The Scriptures proclaim, “*Thus saith Yahweh, The heaven is my throne, and the **earth is my footstool**: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?”* Isa. 66:1.

Have you ever given much thought to the fact that the earth is Yahweh’s footstool?

Have you ever thought that we are made from the dust of the earth? When one walks through the earth with either bare feet, or in sandals in the manner of days of old, his feet get very dirty and dusty. That is the reason for the washing of one’s feet before entering



Y.E.A.



into either his own, or someone else's house.

Scripture reveals that we need to go to Yahweh's footstool in order to worship Him, "*Exalt ye Yahweh our Elohim, and **worship at his footstool; for he is holy,***" Psa. 99:5.

*"Yahweh, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto Yahweh, and vowed unto the mighty (abiyr = winged one) of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, Until I find out a place for Yahweh, an habitation for the mighty (abiyr = winged one) of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood. We will go into his tabernacles: **we will worship at his footstool,**" Psa. 132:1-7.*

In order to worship at, or even as His footstool, we must be washed clean, because we are dust and we don't want to dirty His feet. Therefore, we need to be washed clean in the blood of the Messiah, and also by the washing of water of the word, "*Husbands, love your wives, even as the Messiah also loved the assembly, and gave himself for it; **That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious assembly, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish,**" Eph. 5:25-27.*

Paul reveals that Yahshua, through His Holy Spirit, cleanses us. "*Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of Yahweh our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, **by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;** Which he shed on us abundantly through Yahshua the*

Messiah our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life," Titus 3:1-7.

Our own desire should be that we are cleansed so that we can approach His footstool in humility and worship, or to be washed away like dirt, so that His feet, His footstool might be clean. We should not, we must not bring shame and filth upon Him. He is clean and holy, and that is the way that we must serve Him.

THE ATTITUDE

Truly the footwashing service is an exercise that reminds us of the attitude of humility every year. But we must not wait for the footwashing service in order to exhibit that attitude. We must have the attitude of proper love and humility with us all of the time.

We must ask several questions of ourselves. Could we go out into the world and wash the feet of someone who has exhibited hatred toward us? Suppose someone has cheated us out of something that belonged to us, or has stolen from us. What of other offences or atrocities committed against ourselves? Suppose someone has brought a great deal of pain, grief, and suffering upon us, could we wash that person's feet?

What about some of us who have been forcibly put out of our former affiliation (-s)? Could we humble ourselves to wash the feet of those who forced us out? What about those who disagree vehemently with us, to the point of putting labels or names on us that are not exemplary in the least? What about others who have separated themselves from us? Are we able to humble ourselves and become their servants? These are questions that we must ask as we approach that time. These are attitudes that we must have now, even before that time comes.

YAHSHUA'S EXAMPLE

Yahshua said, "*For I have given you an*



Y. E. A.



example, that ye should do as I have done to you,” Jn. 13:15. Peter said, “For even hereunto were ye called; because Messiah also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps:...,” 1 Pet. 2:21.

Yahshua’s example is a very tall order. Are we willing and able to empty ourselves of everything we have in our possession so that others can prosper and do well? Are we full of zeal for Yahweh’s way of righteousness and the message of the good news of His coming kingdom? We must examine ourselves, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Yahshua Messiah is in you, except ye be reprobates? But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates,”* 2 Cor. 13:5.

We must earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). Can any of us openly declare that we have lived up to the example of Yahshua, or to that of the early New Testament

assembly?

As we approach this year’s Passover, which includes the footwashing ceremony let us examine ourselves thoroughly, questioningly. Let us measure ourselves with the example of the Scriptures themselves. I don’t think that there are many of us who could loudly proclaim that we are readily fulfilling the example of humility in our lives.

Paul also writes, *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup,”* 1 Cor. 11:28. Yes, and let us examine ourselves to consider whether we have the proper humility to wash one another’s feet. Let’s let the act of footwashing carry out its designed purpose of esteeming others better than ourselves, of humbling ourselves and making ourselves the lowest servants of others so that we may be the children of our wondrous Father in heaven.

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This publication is produced by the **YAHWEH’S EVANGELICAL ASSEMBLY** (Y. E. A.) For more copies of this or other information simply write to, Y. E. A., P. O. Box 31, Atlanta, TX. 75551 All publications are FREE.