



A Spiritual Encouragement Message
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Unexpected Love, Beyond Our Cultures

by Oscar Velazquez

The Scriptural way for us Christians today to really understand the New Testament is to also read the Old Covenant. The New Testament does not mean whatever we make of it, it means what it meant in its own world, and that is why it is critical for us to read the Old Covenant as well. We don't read the Scriptures "to see what we can rescue," but we read them because the Lord rescues us through them. If the Scriptures were to be interpreted and explained by using illustrations of our modern world, society and culture; then not one of the men and women in Scriptures ever understood anything.

The meaning of each story can only be unlocked by uncovering the culture behind it. For example, how do we fully understand what Jesus did and meant when He washed the disciples' feet? (John 13:1-17). To understand people better, it helps when we understand their culture. To understand Jesus better, it will help if we understand His culture.

The washing of feet is an ancient custom of hospitality in Middle Eastern culture, but the host only provided the water and the guest washed their own feet. Abraham and Sarah did not wash the feet of the Lord (Genesis 18:1-4). Lot and his family did not wash the feet of the angels (Genesis 19:1-2). Laban also only provided the water so Abraham's servant could wash his own feet (Genesis 24:32). Joseph's steward only provided the water to Joseph's brothers so they could wash their feet themselves (Genesis 43:24). Some old man practicing hospitality gave water to a Levite, his concubine and his servant so they could wash their own feet (Judges 19:20-21).

From the Middle East people's point of view, feet were unclean and filthy from the road, and God spoke to them in the context of their culture (Exodus 3:5, Joshua 5:15). They walked everywhere and the roads were dirty from the manure of camels, donkeys, horses and other animals in the way, and sometimes even human excrement (Deuteronomy 23:13). The

clothing for the priesthood was very carefully defined, but no mention is ever made of footwear (Exodus 28 and 30:17-21). Most likely they ministered barefoot. It meant to separate between the unholy and the holy, between the unclean and the clean.

Feet for them were considered filthy, except Jesus' (Mark 1:6-7), even the most unclean human part of Him was holy, also even the dirtiest part of a carrier of God's Word is holy (Isaiah 52:7).

"Foot" and "shoe" in Middle Eastern culture are like the four letter words. Remember when the statues of Saddam Hussein were taken down? People in Iraq hit the statues with their shoes. Under your feet is the place for your enemies (1 Kings 5:3, Joshua 10:24, Acts 2:35, Romans 16:20). Placing one's foot on a person also indicated dominance and control over him or her.

Remember the time when a Middle Eastern man threw a shoe to former President George W. Bush to offend him as he was speaking in public? Psalm 60:8.

In the Middle East today you don't cross your feet in the synagogue nor in church services, you don't show the bottom of your feet to God or your fellow worshipers, that is taken as an insult similar to wiping off against you (Luke 10:10-11).

Placing your feet at a place also indicated you were claiming your property (Deuteronomy 11:24).

Abigail bowed before David's authority, begging at his feet for forgiveness for the foolish acts of her husband (1 Samuel 25:24-24).

Walking long distances over difficult terrain they obviously developed strong legs and feet and their feet were also considered as their strength. Jacob's life came to an end when he "drew his feet up into the bed"(Genesis 49:33).

It will take extremely deep humility and highly appreciative love for a person to willingly wash someone else's feet (1 Samuel 25:39-42, Luke 7:36-50). It was a humble service not even expected from a servant.

Thirty years after Jesus did it, it became one of the ways to recognize and identify a valuable widow who was worthy to receive help and support among the churches in the Aegean region (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

Jesus did not owe anybody any debt, He did not need anybody's forgiveness, He did not need to bow down to nobody and precisely the moment when He knew He did not need anything from anybody, He decided to humble Himself and show totally unexpected love (John 13:3-5). Will you serve beyond your culture?, Will you serve when trusted with some authority? Peter could not even understand why Jesus his Master wanted to wash his feet, so

Peter would not allow it to happen, but Jesus told him, you will know why after it happens and it will unite them (John 13:6-9). Unexpected love if accepted will unite them, but if rejected it will separate them, like in the story of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:17-24). Jesus taught us to serve each other with unexpected love, with humbly love that goes beyond our cultures, in spite of our social and economic positions, status or levels. Costly unexpected love if is given and accepted creates fusion between both parties, but if denied or rejected creates distance and separates relations. So Peter had to accept it, experience it, understand it, and do likewise to others (John 13:12-17).

This pandemic and sin are separating us in different ways but Jesus unites us as we serve Him and serve each other.

By reading the Old Covenant, I'm sure you now fully understand what Jesus meant when He washed His disciples' feet, why He did it, and also why John wrote it (none of the other gospel writers mentioned it before) by writing it, it was expected from him too.