

FOOT WASHING: IT'S RATIONALE AND NECESSITY

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Abstract

Basuh kaki adalah satu peristiwa yang dilakukan oleh Yesus sebelum Dia meninggalkan dunia ini. Para sarjana Alkitab telah banyak mendiskusikan topik ini. Diskusi para sarjana Alkitab lebih berfokus pada arti dari tindakan Yesus ini dan juga pada pilihan apakah upacara ini perlu dipraktikkan oleh gereja saat ini atau tidak. Penulisan ini bertujuan untuk melihat dari segi alasan disengaja (*intention*) dari Yesus untuk melakukan basuh kaki dan bagaimana hal itu terlihat dalam catatan empat Injil dan juga melihat signifikansi dari perintah dan juga upacara itu sendiri. Penulisan ini menganalisa perbandingan catatan dari Gospels tentang paskah terakhir, analisa narasi dari Yohanes 17, dan analisa grammar dan syntax yang disertai dengan analisa kata-kata penting dalam teks yang dipelajari. Dengan membandingkan catatan empat Injil maka di dapat bahwa dimulaikan dari perintah Yesus sampai pada ketidakhadirannya seorang tuan rumah dan seorang hamba menunjukkan bahwa Yesus sengaja untuk melakukan tindakan cuci kaki di peristiwa Paskah terakhir dengan murid-murid-Nya. Penggunaan term-term keilahian dari Yesus dalam percakapan dengan murid-murid-Nya menunjukkan bahwa upacara ini dimaksudkan untuk diikuti oleh semua orang percaya. Selanjutnya, analisa kata *τιθημι* dalam konteks penggunaannya di buku Yohanes menunjukkan bahwa proses menanggalkan jubah dari Yesus ketika Dia melaksanakan pencucian kaki melambangkan peristiwa salib dimana Yesus menyerahkan nyawanya untuk banyak orang.

Key words: *Foot Washing, Intention, Command, Laying Life.*

Introduction

Foot washing is one of the religious rites practiced by several Christian denominations,¹ which is found in John 13:1-17.² Regarding its meaning, John Christopher Thomas, in his dissertation states seven general scholar interpretations of foot washing: (a) as an example of humility; (b) as a symbol of the Eucharist; (c) as a symbol of baptism; (d) foot washing and its relation with forgiveness sin and/or

¹The Roman Catholic and Greek churches observed the rite mainly as a ceremonial recognition of servanthood among the higher clergy. Some primitive movement of Protestantism practice this rite as ordinance, like Anabaptis, Baptis, and Adventist Church. Melvin E. Dieter, "Footwashing," *New 20th-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. second ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 333.

²Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the B.

cleansing; (e) as a sacrament separated from baptism and Eucharist; (f) as soteriological sign; and (g) as polemic.³

Most Christian scholars propose that when Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, he shown them an example of humility and love. Regarding the aspect of humility, George R. Beasley-Murray points out that the followers of Christ should “walking in the Servant’s way.”⁴ By saying this, Murray signifies that Jesus, as a Servant, has demonstrated the true humility as shown in Phil. 2:1-11. Regarding the idea of love, Murray suggests that it represents Jesus’s love in His ministry and also His death on the cross⁵ In line with Murray, Kostenberger argues that when Jesus stoops to perform this role, not in order to institute a permanent rite, but rather to teach his followers the important of humble, loving service.⁶ Moreover, suggests that the example that Jesus has left for His disciples should not be considered as a perpetuating ordinance in the church.⁷ From these standpoints, some scholars and denominations reject the idea that foot washing should be as a part of the rites for church services. For example, Bruce Milne states that the story of John 13 about foot washing is probably doubtful to be come a sufficient basis for the practise of foot washing becoming ordinance of the church.⁸ Several studies have been done to suggest that foot washing is not only an example of the humility but also as an ordinance that Christians should follow. Hadid J. Cortez, for example, focusing on the exegesis of John 13:12-17, points out that the expressions “ὀφείλω” suggests an idea of obligation. He then compares Jesus’s command to make disciples in Matt. 28:19 with the obligation of foot washing. Based on also on the expressions, “do this in remembrance of me” and “if I do not wash you, you have no share with me” Cortez concludes that “foot-washing is a crucial and necessary for his followers.”⁹

³For the detail explanation of each meaning, see John Christopher Thomas, *Foot Washing in John 13 and The Johannine Community*. (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1990), 2-8, accessed November 22, 2020, <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3505/1/338204.pdf>.

⁴George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, World Biblical Commentary 36 (WBC) (Waco, TX: Word Book, 1987), 241.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament (Grand Rapid MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 485.

⁷Merril C. Tenney, *The Gospel of John. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin. (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1981), 137.

⁸Bruce Milne, *The Message of John*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 199.

⁹Cortez, Hadid J., "An Evaluation of Footwashing as Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (2018). Honor Theses, 173, accessed 19 April 2019, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/honors/173>.

On the other hand, Sungguk Park, by examining the idea of sacramental and the practice of foot washing of three historical period, concludes that “it is our assignment to preserve this sacramental and adapt it to the modern context.”¹⁰

Those suggesting that foot is only an example of humility and love mostly emphasis on its theological signification of this rite. On the other hand, those who suggest that this rite should be an ordinance for all believers lack of the analysis of its background from the four Gospels analysis and narrative analysis of John 13:1-17. This article examines the rationale behind the event of foot washing and in turn, suggests its necessity. To cope these tasks, a comparison of the account of the Passover discourses found in the Gospel of John with the discourse found in the Synoptic Gospels is examined. To make a broader analysis, this study is also informed with the narrative and linguistic analysis surround John 13:1-17.

The Record of Passover in Four Gospels

Gospel writers record the setting of the Passover from different views. Although all of writers write the story of the last Passover in their book, only Luke and John have more than one record of this event. Matthew and Mark mention the Passover specifically in the last events of Jesus (Matthew mentions this word only 4 times - 26:2, 17,18, 19; Mark mentions 5 times; Mark 14:1, 2 [2 times], 14, 16). Luke, on the other hand, mentions two Passover in the life of Jesus. He writes first the event of the Passover in Luke 2:41. In this narration, he describes how every person of Israel go to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, include Jesus' parents. Jumping to Luke 22, here, the author describe the last Passover of Jesus as Matthew and Mark do.

Most scholars agree that in book John, there are three Passover. First, in the beginning of this Gospel John indicates that Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover (John 2:13, 23). Second, the day when Jesus provided food for five thousand men was the day before Passover (John 6:4). Third, in the context of the murder plot the Scribes and the Priest making toward Jesus, John mentions that at the time the “Passover of the Jews was at hand (John 11:55). This is the last Passover in the book of John. The passage in this book that vividly records the time of last Passover is found in John 12:1, “six days before Passover.” Then it is followed by the narrative of Passover where the last supper and foot washing took place (John 13:1). The last Passover recorded in book of John is near the day when Jesus was brought to the court after he was captivated (John 18:28, 39; 19:14). After making a deep observation, Bachiocchi draws a conclusion that the last supper that Jesus spent with his disciples is regarded as the last Passover Jesus shared with His disciples as Passover meal.¹¹

There is an analytical question might arise, why among the Passover mentioned in the Gospel Jesus has spent with His disciples, only in the last Passover

¹⁰Sungguk Park, *The Historic Practice Of Foot-Washing As A Sacrament/Al And A Consideration Of Foot-Washing In Contemporary Christian Context*” (MST Thesis, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 2018), 68.

¹¹Samuele Bacchiocchi, *God's Festival in Scripture and History I* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspective, 1995), 61.

Jesus washes his disciples' feet? Regarding the life of Jesus, Luke mentions that Jesus began His ministry at about thirty years of age (Luk 3:23), and his ministry was about 3 and a half years. Although Passover is celebrated every year, the four writers of the Gospel do not record all the event of Passover in the life of Jesus. The precise answer might not be arrived, however, the following section might suggest an intention of Jesus to do this ritual in the last Passover.

The Absence of the Host in the Synoptic Account

All the Gospel's writers write about the last Passover. Referring to the synoptic Gospels is important to come to a deeper understanding of how foot washing and Passover is connected. Mark and Mathew noted the question asked by His disciple about the place for making the feast of the Passover (Matt 26:17, Mark 14:12). Luke mentions the background of the question, how Jesus tells his two disciples, Peter and John, to go and prepare a place for the feast of the Passover as the respond of the first commandment of Jesus to them to prepare for the feast of the Passover (Luke 22:8). Then they answered by a question as also mentioned in Matthew and Mark. It is interesting to analyze the direction that Jesus pointed to them in relation to the place the disciples should go. Jesus ordered them to "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him . . ." (Mat 26:18 NIV).

Regarding the city that Jesus ordered, it must be Jerusalem. Before the record of the question regarding the place to make the Passover, the narration in Matthew and Mark inform that Jesus and his disciples were in Bethany where He was anointed by a woman in house of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:2-9, respectively).¹² The text later informs that "Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve" (Matt. 26:20). It means, they were not really far from the city which Jesus appointed to celebrate the Passover. In fact, Bethany is located only about 2 miles from Jerusalem. So, it can be assumed that Jesus ordered the disciples to go to Jerusalem when they were in Bethany. Back to the ancient time, God ordered the Israelite that when they celebrate the Passover, they should go to the place where the "Lord choose to establish His name" (Deut. 16:2). James R. Edwards points out, "Jerusalem was the only place where the Passover could be celebrated."¹³

In Greek, Mathew points out a certain man "τὸν δεῖνα" (Mat 26:18 BGT) which the disciples should meet and ask about the room for the Passover they would use. This expression indicates that there is no specific person whom they knew before that Jesus asked the disciples to meet to. Mark and Luke render a different expression to point out the person that disciples should meet. Mark employs: "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" (14:13-14 NIV). Luke shows a similar

¹²On the other hand, Luke does not include this narrative right before the event of Passover. Instead, he only records the story in Simon's house earlier (Luk. 7:36-50). There is a broad discussion regarding this discrepancy. However, this is not the focus of this study.

¹³James R. Edward, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 412.

expression: "He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" (22:10-11 NIV). It is clear that the "certain man" in Mathew is the owner recorded in Mark and Luke. Matthew, in this case, does not include the narration about the meeting of the disciples with a person with a jar.

These three versions of the gospels indicate that there is no specific information about who the host or even the servant is during the meal. They also do not inform the specific place in the city (Jerusalem) where the Jesus and His disciples celebrate the Passover. But, one thing is clear that the owner of the house pointed out "a large room upstairs, furnished and ready" (Mark 14:15). The expression of "furnished and ready" needs a special attention. The Greek words for "furnished and ready" are "ἑστρωμένον ἔτοιμον" from στρωννύω and ἔτοιμος, respectively. The passive form of the word ἑστρωμένον demonstrates that the room had been well furnished before the disciples came. While the adjective ἔτοιμον is an emphatic of the participle ἑστρωμένον indicating that the room had been prepared for Passover. A detail of information about the person, the owner, and the room that the disciples would see demonstrates the "divine knowledge"¹⁴

The fact that the house was well furnished probably because of the situation of Jerusalem at that time. According to Josephus, the people who attended the feast of the Passover could reach three million who gathered in Jerusalem.¹⁵ They came for the purpose of celebrating this event. Beside all the regular houses where each family gather together, probably there were some house provided by some Jerusalem's inhabitant for rent.¹⁶ An allusion of this situation is mentioned in John 11. John informs: "many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover" (Jn. 11:55 NIV).

As indicated above, all the Gospels do not provide any information about the host or the servant during the last Passover Jesus and His disciples celebrated. This scene could be seen as an intention of Jesus to do the foot washing. The narrative of the Synoptic Gospels indicates that when Jesus ordered His disciples to go to the city to prepare the place for the Passover, he only asked to meet a *certain man* which is a homeowner of the room. In fact, during the meal the involvement of this host is not portrayed. This assumes that if there is no homeowner, then there will be no servant to wash the feet of the guests.¹⁷ John narrates that Jesus took the initiative to wash his disciples' feet.

¹⁴Edward, *The Gospel of Mark*, 420.

¹⁵Flavius Josephus, *The War of the Jews or History of the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Francut am Main, BRD, 2018), 215.

¹⁶Bible is not clear about this but the story of Jesus in his childhood in the book of Luke and also the Pentacost in the book of Act show that many Jews who live abroad will come to celebrate the important Jewish festival as required in Torah.

¹⁷Tenney assumes that the last supper was held in a private home, and probably as a secret meeting, it is understandable why no slave was present to fulfill this task. Merrill C. Tenney, *John The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 199.

One may say that Jesus could be the host of the meal. However, the time of foot washing recorded in the book of John took place during the meal. Therefore, it proves that this argument could not be retained since the custom of foot washing as a token of hospitality should be at the time when the guests enter the house. In one occasion, a woman came and washed His feet with fragrant oil. Seeing this, Simon, the Pharisees, thought wrongly about Jesus and the woman because of the woman's act shown to Jesus. However, Jesus directly rebuked him, "And turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair" (Luk. 7:44). Harriet Hill states that if foot washing could occur during or after the meal, Jesus could not legitimately claim that his host had neglected this act of hospitality.¹⁸ Therefore, doing the foot washing during the meal signifies that there is no host in that room. As discussed above, although there was no host, the house was well furnished, including the water and the basin for the foot washing. It suggests that Jesus knew that he would bring the disciples into a furnished house for the Passover where the house itself did not have a host and a servant. In this furnished house, he performed the foot washing. From this perspective, it is the intention of Jesus to do this in front of his disciples.

Narrative and Exegetical Investigation of John 13:1-16

Having discussed some background of foot washing and foot, this chapter will proceed to the narrative analysis of John 13:1-17. The main task of this chapter is to examine the narrative as it is found in this passage. This part also aims to resolve some exegetical issues found in the account of foot washing in this passage. Before tackling the main issue of this part, a suggestion of an outline is provided.

Outline of John 13:1-17

Before proceeding to the main task of this section, a short outline is given. This outline aims to be a guide for the further analysis. Below is a suggested outline of John 13:1-17.

- John 13:1-3 Introduction (motive)
 - v. 1 Love
 - v. 2 Allusion of Passover
 - 2b Interlude – Judas betrayal
 - v. 3. Jesus will go to God
- John 13:4-10 Jesus washes His disciples' feet
 - 6-10 Jesus washes Peter's feet (conversation between Jesus and Peter)
 - v. 11 Interlude to last scene: Judas betrayal
- John 13:12-15 Reasons and command of foot washing reveal
 - 12-14a Reason of foot washing
 - 14b-15 Command of foot washing
- John 13:16-17. Closing for the first scene of foot washing (appeal)¹⁹

¹⁸Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication* (Manchester: St. Jerome Pub., 2006), 259.

¹⁹This outline is mine.

In this passage, (vv 1-17) John uses several literary devices to describe the event in the upper room. The inclusio clearly appear in the repetition of root word “know” ‘εἰδῶς’ (v. 1) and οἶδατε (v. 17). He also employs a repetition word “νίπτω” (wash). It occurs 8 times in 7 forms.²⁰ Interestingly, the usage of νίπτω in verse 8 in conversation between Jesus and Peter are both in subjunctive mode, to point out psychological aspect of the narrative.²¹ The syntactical usage of subjunctive will be broader discussed in the other part of this paper.

Introduction of the Passage

As indicated in the discussion of the outline of John 13:1-17, the first three verses are the introduction of the passage. In this part John provides the motive of the foot washing. The passage begins with the information that the Passover is about to come. Before proceeding to the discussion of the motive of Jesus in the first three verses, a short explanation of the aspect of time of the Passover is provided first.

The Matter of Time

There are several expressions indicating time signals found in the discourse of the foot washing. The first is the preposition Πρὸ followed by the genitive τῆς ἑορτῆς. The usage of this expression affirms when the event in John 13:1-17 took place. This preposition with genitive points out the temporal aspect, “before.” There is dispute about this passage. Some scholars argue that this story took place on Wednesday. For example, William H. Van Dorren, commenting on this preposition, states that immediately before the Feast of the Passover is the fourth day of the week – Wednesday.²² Others argue that it was Thursday.²³ Thomas points out that the preposition “before” emphasizes what the synoptic gospels render as the time for the preparation of the feast of Passover and not the specific days.²⁴ Based on the context,

²⁰νίπτειν (Jo3:5 BGT) νίπτεις (Joh 13:6 BYZ)

²¹Osborne elaborates the point of view of a narrative which show a psychological dimension the author provides to imply the information of the thought and feeling of the character. Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 205.

²²William H. Van Dorren, *Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publication, 1981), 1053. See also R.C.H. Lenski, *the Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, Lenski, Augsburg Publishing House, 1942).

²³“The first day” [Mathew 26:17], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-1980), 5:521-2. Since the main point of this paper is the foot washing, only a little portion of the date of Passover will be addressed in this paper.

²⁴Thomas states:
It was past three o'clock, the commencement of the (Matthew, Mark, Luke) first (Matthew, Mark) day of unleavened bread (Matthew, Mark, Luke), - at a later period of which, as the Law enjoined (Luke), men were in habit of killing the Paschal lamb

the emphasis of the author is not on the specific day but on the reality regarding Jesus's last event in this world. In this case, the phrase "before the feast" John mentions in the beginning of chapter 13 relates to the next statement that Jesus "knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father" (Jn. 13:1 KJV). Before Jesus left, he performed foot washing in front of the disciples. This expression is discussed later.

The second is the phrase δείπνου γινομένου. Borchert points out that the opening of the text provides a striking note that it was just prior to Passover meal and should be understood and interpreted as taking place in the context of a Passover setting. According to him, this setting is clearly seen when John uses the time direction "hour" (ώρα v. 1).²⁵ However, the participle in the phrase καὶ δείπνου γινομένου, can function as temporal and in the same time it functions also as genitive absolute.²⁶ It seems, John uses this participle to stress that something which is about to come, that is, the foot washing event. Therefore, this phrase can be best translated, "while the supper was going on," or as translated by NAS, *during the supper*.

John also gives a time signal when he denotes an allusion of Judas' betrayal in the expression, οὗ διαβόλου ἤδη βεβληκότος εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἵνα παραδοῖ αὐτὸν Ἰούδας Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου (v. 2). In this expression, John uses the participle βεβληκότος to anticipate the betrayal recorded in vv. 26-30. However, in the same time, this participle should be seen as connected with the previous participle γινομένου functioning as a signal of the foot washing discourse which John places after this section.

(Mark), when the disciples join Him (Matthew). Where, asked they (Matthew, Mark), - or Peter and Joh, in response to His command to go and get ready the Passover for Himself and His disciples (Luke), - were preparation to be made? He bade (Matthew, Mark, Luke), them (Matthew), or just two of them (Mark), - these the two just mentioned (Luke), - go into the city (Matthew, Mark, Luke), to such an one (Matthew), whom they would discover by following a man met them carrying a pitcher of water (Mark, Luke), and tell him that the Master's time was at hand, that at his house was He keeping the Passover with His disciples (Matthew); inquiring His disciples (Matthew); inquiring in His name for the guestchamber in which to hold the feast. they would be shown a large upper room furnished (Mark, Luke), and prepared after the custom of the season (Mark). There they were to make ready. They went and found as their Master had indicated (Mark, Luke). They did as He commanded (Matthew), and make ready the Passover (Matthew, Mark, Luke), though a full day before the regular time for the feast (John). At the appointed hour of six o'clock (Luke), Jesus came along with the twelve and sat down (Matthew, Mark, Luke). David Thomas, *The Gospel of John*, 376.

²⁵Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture 25B (TNAC) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publisher, 2002), 76-7.

²⁶This is also supported by Robertson. He denotes that v. 4 shows plainly that the meal was still going on. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Robertson's Word Picture in the New Testament V, The Fourth Gospel The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1932), 236.

The analysis above can be concluded as follows: Before John gives the discourse of the foot washing, he provides the time signals emphasizing that the foot washing was about to take place. First, it was done in the last Passover Jesus held with his disciples and Jesus signified it before that feast. Second, it was done during the supper. Third, it was done when Satan had provoked Judas to betray Jesus.

The Motive of Foot Washing

As mentioned earlier, this is the last Passover that Jesus spent with His disciples. In the verses 1 and 3, John provides clues regarding the motive of doing the foot washing. First, he says that “εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐλήλυθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῆ ἔκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα” (v. 1). KJV and ESV added a temporal aspect to the participle εἰδὼς and the sentence reads “When Jesus knew that His hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the father” (KJV). John reemphasizes this thought when he says in v. 3, “καὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθεν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν ὑπάγει.” The idea of the indicative usage in ἐξῆλθεν and ὑπάγει signifies a certainty that Jesus had come from God, and at the time when John saw this, he knew that Jesus was about to go to God. In fact, there is no discussion about Jesus’ plan to go back to His Father prior to chapter 13. It means that, before He ascended to heaven, Jesus would perform something significant. As Andreas J. Köstenberger points out that the expression of “Jesus’s leaving ‘this world’ and the disciples’ being ‘in the world’ (anticipating John 17) indicates the occasion and purpose of the upcoming section: the gap left by Jesus’s departure and the disciples’ need for instruction on how to cope with life in this world once Jesus has left.”²⁷ In other words, Jesus knew that he would be separated with the disciples and He must perform something that the disciple would see and take it as an example that they should follow. However, it was never expected before by the disciples. .

Moreover, John provides another motive why Jesus wanted to do the foot washing. He says “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (v. 1). It indicates that Jesus wanted to form the foot washing as a token of love to his disciples. Leon Morris correctly denotes that the love mentioned in this passage relates to Jesus’s special love to his disciples and not the public. He says, “Until now Jesus has had a ministry to a people in general. From this point, he consecrates on those he loves intimately.”²⁸

Furthermore, Luke indicates a reason why Jesus did the foot washing which is not mentioned in the book of John. In their books, both Luke and John not only denote the same setting of Passover but also point a statement declaring that Jesus is the servant among the disciples According to Luke, there is a dispute among the disciples in regard to the issue who among them “should be accounted the greatest” (Luke 22:24). Seeing this, Jesus rebuked them by saying that “who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant” (Lk. 22:26). Luke clearly provides an allusion to the foot washing when he said, “For who is greater,

²⁷Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2013), 131.

²⁸Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995). 546.

the one who reclines *at the table*, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves” (Lk. 22:27). Johns states a similar expression of Jesus, "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet." (13:13). Thus, this parallel shows that the purpose of Jesus' act of this menial servant act in front of his disciples was to rebuke the spirit of being the greatest among them. Instead of becoming greater among others, Jesus wanted them to serve one to another and He gave them the example by doing the foot washing.

The Scene of Foot Washing

The scene of foot washing starts from v. 4. In this verse, John employs the phrase *ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνου*. The verb *ἐγείρεται* is a verb indicative present passive 3rd person singular which functions syntactically as historical present. This syntactical function is valid with the verb *τίθησιν* in the phrase *τίθησιν τὰ ἰμάτια*.²⁹ Wallace elaborates that the syntactical function of historical present is used fairly frequently in narrative literature to describe a past event that “normally to portray an event vividly, as though the reader were in the midst of the scene as it unfolds.”³⁰ Therefore, where readers read John's text, the imagination comes to mind that it seems, at the time, none of the disciples willingly to do a task of servant to wash one to another's feet. Here, John describes a sudden change of situation while all of the participants at that night possibly were sitting waiting for someone to this menial task. Moreover, in the next verse, John describes how Jesus willingly makes himself as servant.³¹ The verb *διέζωσεν* as indicative aorist active 3rd person singular followed by *ἑαυτόν* (v.5) as *reflexive active* shows this evidence. This *reflexive active* is used to denotes that the subject acts upon himself.³² In this case, this action comes from Jesus' very own will.

²⁹Brodie denotes that “Jesus' removal of his clothes contributed significantly to the idea of the divine self-giving (13:1-5.. the subsequent episodes develop and dramatize that self giving idea, and they do so by implying a descent from kingship to nakedness.” Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 546.

³⁰Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basic: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 526. Most translations, like KJV, NAB, , NIV, NKJ render this verb as past.

³¹Paul describes the very nature of Christ is humble as he states: “but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,” although in this context, Jesus humbled himself before God the Father and “emptied Himself” and “*being made* in the likeness of men” (Philip. 2:7). John, on the other hand, provides it clear evidences that Jesus did humble himself even before men.

³²Wallace states: “in such cases naturally the *reflexive pronoun* is employed as the direct object (e.g., *ἑαυτόν*), while the corresponding reflexive middle omits the pronoun.” Wallace, 413. Bernard emphasizes also that “this was appropriate to a slave.” The towel (*linteum*) was fastened to the shoulder, so as to leave both hands

Further, the narration moves to the act of Jesus in washing the disciples' feet. John indicates that before going to Peter, the disciples whose feet had been washed by Jesus, did not complain (v. 5). However, when Jesus was about to wash Peter's feet, he complained by asking, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" (Joh. 13:6). This question confirms the idea that Jesus was doing something that was unexpected to the disciples. For Peter, it was impossible that his teacher should do this to him. For this reason, he rejected when Jesus wanted to wash his feet.³³ It is interesting to analyze the conversation between Jesus and Peter occurred in v. 6. When Jesus came (ἔρχεται) to Peter to wash his feet, Peter questioned if Jesus was sure to wash his feet (v. 6). The phrase ὁ ἐγὼ ποιῶ is emphatic to stress what Jesus meant to Peter (v. 7).³⁴ One of the key points of the event of foot washing lies in the next conversation between Jesus and Peter. The usage of νίπτω in verse 8 in conversation between Jesus and Peter both are in subjunctive mode.³⁵ John tries to describe a tension and emotion between Peter and Jesus. The phrase οὐ μὴ νίψῃς τοὺς πόδας μου show an emphatic negation.³⁶ It is clearly seen by the using of οὐ and μὴ with subjunctive where by these usages, John tries to describe total rejection from Peter when Jesus wants to wash his feet. Wallace points out that the combination between οὐ and μὴ plus subjunctive denies a potentiality.³⁷ One may assume that this rejection because Peter not only knew that foot washing is done only by menial servant but also, he felt not deserved because Jesus was Rabbi and the disciples called Him "Lord."

Interestingly, to reply the expression "you will never wash my feet," John uses the same form of subjunctive mood but in a conditional sentence. Here, John likely wants to describe how the foot washing that Jesus performs is very important; ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ' ἐμοῦ ("Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me" (v. 8 NAB)).³⁸ This combination is categorized in the *third*

free. J. H. Bernard, *John*, The International Critical Commentary II (TICC) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark LTD, 1999), 459.

³³According to Broddy, Peter's rejection indicated that his thought had been influenced by worldly principle which almost leadeth him to evil thing. e did not understand what Jesus was doing and by rejecting Jesus's act. Broddy, *The Gospel According to John*, 433.

³⁴Bernard, *John*, 460.

³⁵Although subjunctive has a range of different translation, but basicly the subjunctive is the mood of probability which expresses a verbal action as *uncertain but probable*, Ibid, 462.

³⁶Wallace denotes that this form is the strongest to negate something in Greek. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 468

³⁷Ibid, 468.

³⁸Collin Morris asserts that the expression "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me," is a utterance that foot washing as a custom, "can explain it." He continues that "humility will fall short of the sense." In other words, if feet washing only as a custom or practice of humility, then Jesus needs not to conveys such a strong utterances. Collin Morris, *Examination of the Validity and Meaning of the*

class condition which encompasses a broad range of potentialities in Koine Greek. It depicts what is *likely to occur* in the *future*, what could *possibly occur*, or even what is only *hypothetical* and will not occur.³⁹ The word *νίψω* is in the part of protasis clause subjunctive “unless I wash you” (NAB). “if I don’t wash you” (NAS), or “if I wash thee not” (KJV). On the other hand, the apodosis *οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ’ ἐμοῦ* means that Peter was likely to lose his part in Jesus as the result of rejecting of the service Jesus performs toward him.

Moreover, the meaning of foot washing would be better understood clearly by analyzing the meaning of *μέρος*. Most translations translate the word *μέρος* as “part”,⁴⁰ but NAB renders it as “inheritance.” Most scholars propose that this noun refers to the part of Jesus’ ministry and service,⁴¹ washing free from sin,⁴² and His glory.⁴³ Meanwhile, Brown emphasizes that the Greek *μέρος* is significant because although the phrase *ἔχεις μέρος* can mean simply “to share with; be partner with,” but it means more than fellowship; for *μέρος* (also *meris*) is used in LXX to translate the Hebrew word *רֶגֶל*. This word describes the God-given heritage to Israel.⁴⁴ In its usage in the NT regarding the share portion that people will receive. *Köstenberger expresses*: “*μέρος* is used with reference to people’s being assigned a place in God’s eternal kingdom, either in fellowship with God (Rev. 20:6; 21:8; 22:19) or separated from him (Matt. 24:51; Luke 12:46).”⁴⁵ The foot washing has a significant impact for the disciples, not only as a token of the humility among them, but also as a sign that the disciples who do that share parts in the kingdom of heaven.

Ordinance of Footwashing, A Thesis presented to Principle V. N. Olsen Newbold College, April 1964.

³⁹Ibid , 470

⁴⁰KJV, , NIV, NKJ

⁴¹Bernard, *John*, 461.

⁴²Leon Moris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 584. See also John Calvin

⁴³Barnes notes that this phrase means nothing *in common* with Jesus in possessing the Spirit, being interested in His work and even no participation in His glory. Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament, Luke and John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 318. Evans argues that “foot washing is symbolic of something more than a gesture of fellowship. It is only the death of Jesus (and its acceptance by the believer that brings eternal life.” Evans, *John’s Gospels, Hebrew-Revelation*, 122.

⁴⁴Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (xiii-xxi)* The Anchor Bible 29A Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1984), 565. Brown elucidates that this terms in Number 18:20, Deut 12:12, 14:27 is used to describe the heritage given by God to the tribes except Levi.

⁴⁵*Köstenberger, John*, 406.

The Commands of Foot Washing

Having analyzing the scene and the context of foot washing, the following section specifically analyzes the grammar and syntax features of the passage which contains the command of Jesus regarding the foot washing as the main task of this paper. The usage of present active indicative in the phrase found in *Υμεῖς φωνεῖτέ με, Ὁ διδάσκαλος, καὶ Ὁ κύριος· καὶ καλῶς λέγετε, εἰμὶ γάρ.* (Joh 13:13 BYZ) is a strong argument for the foundation of foot washing among His disciples. All the verbs in this verse, φωνεῖτέ, λέγετε, εἰμὶ found in this passage (verb indicative present active 2nd person plural from φωνέω) function syntactically as a customary action to signal either an action that regularly occurs or ongoing state.⁴⁶ It is quite complicated to think that this command should applied to all the believers. However, this command is accompanied with the deity attribute which appears elsewhere in the book of John.

It suggests that John recalls the disciples, from the past, at this present, and probably in the future will always address Jesus as their Teacher and Lord and Jesus affirms this by saying, εἰμὶ γάρ (for I am). In the following verse, Jesus repeats the hierarchy but in the same time surprises the disciples by stating: “εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ ἔνιψα ὑμῶν τοὺς πόδας ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος, καὶ ὑμεῖς ὀφείλετε ἀλλήλων νίπτειν τοὺς πόδας·” (Joh 13:14 BGT). The using of aorist in ἔνιψα is interesting. It functions syntactically as *immediate past aorist* that indicates an event that happened rather recently.⁴⁷ The result can be seen among the disciples and it is as a *ὑπόδειγμα* (*example* in v. 15, this part will be discussed in another part of this paper).⁴⁸

The command is clearly seen in the verb *ὀφείλετε* (verb indicative present active second masculine plural in v. 14). The best category of this present tense is iterative present since this is a present with imperative mood.⁴⁹ One may argue that the command of foot washing is not in the overt act but in the inner principle.⁵⁰ However, the usage of this verb is predominately in the NT to express obligation,

⁴⁶Wallace, 521-2

⁴⁷Wallace denotes that immediate past aorist or dramatic aorist emphasizes something like *just now, as in just now I told you.* Ibid, 564

⁴⁸Crosby denotes that the word for “example” (*hypodeigma*) used here by given (John 13:15) is unique in all the gospels, in first testament, it usage relates to an invitation to others to emulate and exemplary way of dying.

⁴⁹ Wallace states: “The present tense may be used to describe an event that *repeatedly* happens. (The *distributive* present belongs here, too: the use of the present tense for individual acts distributed to more than one object.) It is frequently found in the imperative mood, since an action is urged to be done. The iterative present is common.” Ibid, 520.

⁵⁰ David Thomas, *Gospel of John* v. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1980), 388. Barnes also asserts the same idea that there is no evidence that Jesus intended to make it as an ordinance, rather it is only a manifest of an act of humility. Barnes, *Luke and John*, 319.

necessity, duty, and *be obligated*; with an infinitive following it indicate a *must, ought to*.⁵¹

The command of foot washing is reaffirmed by Jesus in the v. 15. Jesus says, “ὁπόδειγμα γὰρ ἔδωκα ὑμῖν ἵνα καθὼς ἐγὼ ἐποίησα ὑμῖν καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε.” Most translation render the phrase καὶ ὑμεῖς ποιῆτε has its connected with the conjunction ἵνα. “That ye should do” (KJV), “that you also should do” (NAS). Wallace denotes the syntactically function of subjunctive plus ἵνα as a force of command, although it is rarely in used.⁵²

The Problem with Jesus’ Command

Many scholars argue, as mentioned earlier that practice of foot washing and its command is a symbolic commandment which refer to the humility then it is not applicable today. However, one may consider that the command of Jesus regarding the foot washing is simple and not in figurative form like, “eat my body” or “drink my blood,” rather, this commandment was being given after Jesus showed an example, and he asserts, “you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” and “you also should do as I did to you.” (Joh 13:15). Regarding this issue, Morris states, “Yet we should not take the feet washing, standing as it does at the head of the long section of the Farewell Discourse, as no more than a reaction to the petty-mindedness of the disciples. It

is a significant action, setting the tone for all that follows.”⁵³

Galen Currah has tried to compiled all the command of Jesus, and he has listed that there are more than 300 commands of Jesus.⁵⁴ Currah categorized the commandments of Jesus in two different categories; general, which is applicable for Jesus’ disciples and, specific, which applicable only the time Jesus lived. Currah has categorized Jesus’ commandment of foot washing in the part of *general*, which means that it should be applicable for every believer.⁵⁵

The Closing Scene of Foot Washing

The two last verses of this scene depict the closing utterance of Jesus of foot washing. In v. 16 here Jesus asserts the hierarchy that “a servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.” There are two emphasis that Jesus wants to stress, first, servant is not greater (μείζων) than his lord,

⁵¹ Friber lexicon, ὀφείλω. In commenting the v. 12 Butlmann states that the act of foot washing that Jesus performs in not only an illustration but the disciples have actually experienced it performed on themselves. 474. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 474.

⁵² Wallace, 476.

⁵³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 544.

⁵⁴ Galen Currah, 300+ Commands of Jesus. Accessed May 16, 2021, http://www.paul-timothy.net/pages/jesus/docs/300_commands_of_jesus.pdf

⁵⁵ *ibid*.

and second, servant is not greater than the one who sent him. Interestingly, Jesus in his incarnation, He acknowledges that Father is greater than Him (John 14:28). There are quite plenty clear passages of the book showing how Jesus subdues himself to the will of the Father as The One who sent Him.⁵⁶ It is clear in His last conversation with his disciples. In this part, Jesus repeats the expression he just uttered, “Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. (Joh 15:20 KJV). The whole passage of the scene of foot washing is ended with a beatitude word, *εἰ ταῦτα οἴδατε, μακάριοί ἐστε ἐὰν ποιῆτε αὐτά*, “If you know this, you are blessed if you do this.” The form, *εἰ οἴδατε* is a first class condition that assumes as reality,⁵⁷ indicating that if the disciples knows this, then they are blessed, this followed by the second conditional subjunctive third class, *ἐὰν ποιῆτε αὐτά*, which refers to a “condition is uncertain but likely.”⁵⁸ It seems Jesus pointed again to the disciples what He just performed earlier, namely, the act of foot washing and the command he rendered to them. They are blessed if they know/*understand*, what He just stated, they are blessed if they do what he just performed.

Relation with Passover

There are two things that Jesus asked that the disciples should do in the last Passover; eating the bread and drinking the wine as commemoration of Him and washing one another's feet just as he gives them example. Both are commands during Passover. Many scholars and denomination agree for the ordinance of Holy Supper and how it relates to the Passover but not the foot washing. This section attempts to see the connection of foot washing and Passover by analyzing the word the usage of *τίθημι* and its usages in the book of John.

One of the keys points to analyze the relationship between foot washing lies to the Greek verb *τίθημι* (lay aside/down). As indicated earlier, the servant motive is clearly seen in the act of foot washing in this narrative specifically in the usage of the verb *τίθημι* and most of scholars are on their position regarding this motive.⁵⁹ Borchert denotes that John intends to use the verb *τίθημι* to clearly portray a fashion

⁵⁶There are 26 verses denotes that Jesus himself posits that He is sent by God the Father; 4:34, 5:23, 24,30,37; 6:38, 39, 44; 7:16, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 9:4, 12:44, 45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 20:21.

⁵⁷Wallace, 450. 685, 689.

⁵⁸Eike Mueller, class notes for 640 NTST Greek Reading, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, November 2014.

⁵⁹For example, Thomas see the v.4 is the act of Jesus who does not remains in His reclining posture, but he himself rises and act the duty of a servant. Thomas, *Gospel to John*, 380.

of slave.⁶⁰ He denotes that this verb is used in the expression of “laying down his life” in John 10:11, 15, 17-18, 15:13.⁶¹ Many scholars propose similar thought that this verb relates to the death of Christ, for example, John Marsh denotes that this word has connection with the death of Jesus by referring back to the passage of the good shepherd.⁶²

The word *τιθημι* itself occurs 18 times in the book of John. The first usage is found in chapter 2:10 which translated “serve” the wine (wedding at Cana), the second, it occurs in John 10 occurs 4 times and in 15:13, relates to “laying down his life.” Next, it occurred in the foot washing scene, John 13:4. In John 13:37-38, John uses it to describe the eagerness of Peter to lay his life for Jesus. in John 15:16, this word translated as “appointed” denoting that Jesus chose and appointed the disciples to bear fruit. While in John 19:19, John uses this verb to describe the inscription written on the cross prepared by Pilate. Interestingly, the rest usages of this verb are in the conversation regarding the question of the placement of the death body of Christ (5 verses; 19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). This statistic proves that the most occurrences of this verb refer to the death of Jesus; before and after His death.

It is not a coincidence if John uses this verb mostly regarding the death of Christ. John wants to point out that the act of foot washing is not merely about pointing out an example of humility in the sense of hospitality that Jesus asks the disciples to do as he does, but a servant motive who “lay his life for many.”

Moreover, as it is found in elsewhere in his book, John points out several times the servant motive of Jesus: “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work’” (Joh 4:34); “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (Joh 6:38); “but that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do” (Joh 14:31); “just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love. (Joh 15:10).⁶³

Regarding laying his life, John describes vividly the word of Jesus in connection with his Father’s command, “no one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to

⁶⁰Borchert not only denotes that this unmistakable is pointing out the humbling and dishonoring symbolism but also Borchert John 12-21 (TNAC), 80.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²John Marsh, *Saint John*, Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia, PA, 1968), 487. Tasker affirms this in his statement, “it is most significant that the verb (*τιθημι*) translated *laid aside* is also used for the “laying down’ of His life by the good Shepherd in x. 15.” R.V.G. Tasker, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 157. Moreover, NAB’s note for the v. 5 states: “The act of washing another's foot was one that could not be required of the lowliest Jewish slave. It is an allusion to the humiliating death of the crucifixion” “John 13:5” New American Bible revised edition (Washington, DC: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., 2010). See also, *Köstenberger*, 404.

⁶³ Paul understands this in his letter to the Philippians when he describes the real servant manifestation of Jesus, “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (Phi 2:5-7)

take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." (Joh10:18). John reaffirms this in I John 1:16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1Jo 3:16).

Theological Implication

The work of salvation is portrayed clearly in the last Passover Jesus and His disciples. Eating the unleavened bread and drinking wine are the symbol of death of Jesus while the act of foot washing refers to the motive of Jesus, as servant, who obey His Father's commandment to lay His life for the sake of Salvation. The servant motive of Jesus had been performed in a symbolic action; namely, foot washing.

This thought should be in mind of believers every time they practice the foot washing. Jesus who did not consider his glorious throne, had left it, humbled himself as servant who laid His life for the sake of human beings. This very thought will lead all the believer to humble to one another and will give his highest respect to Jesus who willingly humbled himself, came to the world, washed away sins of the world, and return to his Father.

One may argue that cultural background should be considered as a reason to reject the commands of foot washing, but Jesus goes beyond the culture since He demonstrates the unusual practice of foot washing. Instead of supporting the cultural aspect that foot washing is done by a gentiles slave, He, as Master and Lord, do this as an example to be followed by his disciples.

Summary

The introduction described the discussion in regard to the meaning and the necessity of the foot washing. In the same time, it provides the gap that might be filled by this study. In terms of meaning, scholars have suggested several meanings such as: (a) an example of humility; (b) as a symbol of the Eucharist; (c) as a symbol of baptism; (d) foot washing and its relation with forgiveness sin and/or cleansing; (e) as a sacrament separated from baptism and Eucharist; (f) as soteriological sign; and (g) as polemic. In term of its necessity, scholars are divided in two main streams. Some scholars, based on the theological significancy, reject the foot washing as an ordinance for the believers. While others see this rite as an obligation for all believers. This present study suggests the rationale behind this rite and in the same time provides an idea of its necessity.

Analysis of the setting of Passover in the four Gospels and the allusion of the last Passover that referred to the foot washing in John shows that it is the intent of Jesus to perform such action in front of his disciples before He left to His Father. This intent is indicated in the way Jesus commanded some of his disciples to prepare the venue for the eating of the Passover and the absence of the host and the slave during the event.

The study of passage under investigation suggests that the narrative in John 13:1-17 was vividly portrayed by John to convince the reader how important of foot washing. From the very beginning of the act of foot washing until the command of foot washing passed by Jesus, showed that foot washing is an important action describe not merely as example of humility and hospitality, but as a performance of servant motive of Jesus to come to this world and died. It was performed not according to the customary action, but Jesus Himself takes the initiative to do so as an example to do a command that should be applied in Christian.

Conclusion

The analysis of the account of the Passover in four Gospels suggest that Jesus intended to perform the act of washing his disciples' feet during the last Passover. It is clearly implied from the preparation of the Passover which Jesus ordered to His disciples to the time when the foot washing occurred. As seen in the analysis, there is no host and slave were depicted, and Jesus took the initiative to do the menial servant task, namely, washed the feet of His disciples. It means that Jesus set the situation where there were only Him and His disciples presented in that room so that He could performed the foot washing.

The narrative analysis, which is informed also by the grammatical and syntactical analysis and several key words analysis, suggests that Jesus did the foot washing as a sign of His leaving to His Father and a sign of His love to His disciple. However, He did not performance the act of foot washing for the sake only of humility and hospitality, rather, it showed a servant motive of Jesus from the very beginning to give Himself for many people. Moreover, the command of Jesus regarding the foot washing comes with the command in the last supper setting. Therefore, this command should be categorized as a general command as the other command found in the gospel. In other words, practicing foot washing should be considered as a command for all believers.

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