



"I AM NOT FIT TO CARRY HIS SANDALS ..."

Over spring this year we're going to be thinking 'feet.' Yes, you heard me right: feet. To be precise, Jesus' feet (which I guess is still a little weird). But throughout the Gospels there are stacks of references to Jesus' feet. And I've been reading the Bible long enough to know that every word is there for a reason; every word carries weight and meaning. Even when the word is 'feet.'

Why feet, then? Jesus' feet tell us a lot about the man – and the God – whose feet they are. They tell us a lot about the kind of life He lived, but they also tell us a lot about what our attitudes to Him should be.

We're going to look at one of those references today – and you can find variations in all 4 Gospels, and in Acts:

Matthew 3:1-17

John the Baptist refers to Jesus as One "whose sandals I am not fit to carry" (or 'untie', as the other Gospels put it). What is he saying? He's saying, "I am not worthy. I am not worthy to touch His feet. I'm not even worthy to touch His footwear."

There are probably very few of us who would be happy handling someone else's footwear. You might be alright with your kid's – just about – but other people's? Pass the tongs or the surgical gloves! But notice, John doesn't say, "I wouldn't be happy about this." He says, "I am not worthy of this."

According to the *Talmud*, removing a person's sandals was the job of a lowly slave, in advance of washing that person's feet. Yet John says, "I am not even worthy to do *that*." I.e. "I don't deserve any kind of recognition or praise. But *He* does."

So, what makes Jesus, worthy? Worthy of respect? Of worship? Worthy of our very lives, perhaps? He's ...

1) The Definition Of Goodness. The NT refers to Jesus as the Holy One of God. But what does 'holy' mean (if we're using it properly)? The Hebrew for 'holy', *kadosh*, means 'set apart.' And in the OT it's used of God Himself, because He's 1) different, and 2) good.

And we're not.

No matter how hard we try, we're not (notice that word 'we.' We're all in the same boat here). In fact, not even the angels measure up. In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah has his vision of God sitting on the throne of the universe, he sees *seraphim* all around Him. They're singing *kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (which is a Hebrew way of saying, "He's beyond super-holy!"). And they're described as having wings on their backs, but also over their faces (because they're not fit to look at Him) and over their feet (because they're not fit to stand in His presence).

No wonder Isaiah says, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in a people of unclean lips!" Or as John puts it, "I am not worthy ..." And yet, somehow, that God became flesh and blood in Jesus.

And because of Him there is the potential for all of us to be holy.

2) The Definition Of Greatness. John says, "I baptise you with water, but there is One coming who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire!" Now is that the fire of judgment, or of cleansing? I think both. For some, Jesus is salvation; for others, judgement, depending on how we respond. But the main point is this: Jesus has all the power of God at His fingertips, but it comes with a twist: that power is balanced with humility, with meekness.

When Jesus came, He didn't levitate His way from one place to another, with a glorious halo round His head, nice-looking teeth, etc. No, He walked as we walk, where we walk; He allowed His feet to get dirty. And even though John the Baptist says, "I am not fit to carry His sandals," Jesus never expected it anyway.

Instead, Jesus took on the role of a servant. "The Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," He said (Matthew 20:28). He even washed the feet of His followers (John 13). The point being, Jesus is greater than us.

In *every* sense.

3) The Definition Of Kindness. Here's something you might not have realised before: in the belief-systems of the ancient world, deities had very little regard for human beings. In most of them, humans were seen as little more than slaves, puppets, playthings for the gods.

But the Bible is different. Yes, Jesus is better than us and greater than us. And yet, He looks at us and says, "You are My sons and My daughters. And I love you."

The most powerful illustration of this is the Parable of the Lost Sons (Luke 15:11-24). The younger son insults his father, takes his inheritance, and squanders the lot. And when he decides to return home, he says to himself: "I am not worthy to be called his son. I'm no better than a servant (*misthios* or 'hired hand')." But the father sees him from a distance, runs to save him from being stoned, hugs him, kisses him (the stuff that would make most sons want to curl up and die), and welcomes him home – as his son. The older son, on the other hand, believes his father's love is to be earned, and refuses to celebrate.

Of course, the sons = us; the father = God. But the point is: we are not worthy of God's affections, and yet Jesus loves us, just as we are, and takes all of our guilt and shame onto Himself – just like the dad in the story.

Perhaps that's what makes Him most worthy of all?

His Worth – And Ours

The 21st century world sees things very differently to John the Baptist. The phrase "we are not worthy" has become a part of our vernacular, but when do we say it and really mean it? Instead, we expect the universe to revolve around us. Everything is on tap, on demand, we want it, and we want it now. And we may not realise it, but that has affected the way we see things, even as Christians. We have become as egocentric as the world around us, from the content of our songs to our definition of what makes a 'good service.' We may not say it, but our attitude betrays it.

We think we're worthy.

What John is saying is: we're not. We're *not* worthy. But Jesus, is. And, ironically, it is only when we recognise *that* fact that we begin to recognise our own meaning and purpose and value. It is only in recognising Jesus' worth that we truly begin to recognise our own.

So, why live your life for Jesus? Why live in obedience to Him, when it gets difficult; when the Christian life is a struggle; when there are pressures outside of us and inside of us to go a different way, walk a different path; when it would be easier to just give up and give in?

Because Jesus is the definition of goodness, greatness, kindness.

Or as *L'Oreal Paris* might put it: because He's worth it.