

Cleansed for Service

When we come to John 13, we come to an entirely new section of John's gospel. In the first 12 chapters, we have studied "the book of signs"; as we come to chapter 13, we enter "the book of glory." We remember that in the earlier chapters, Jesus had referred to His "hour" having not yet come. In John 13:1, however, John says that Jesus' "hour had come." The hour about which John and Jesus speak is the hour of His crucifixion/resurrection/ascension. In the thinking of most people, the cross of Jesus is the lowest point in human history — the act of greatest injustice and shameful violence. In John's gospel, however, the cross is the climax of human history, the greatest moment in the history of redemption. In chapters 13-17, Jesus is dealing with His disciples, unlike His public ministry in John 1-12. It is in this private moment with His apostles that we learn major lessons that they needed for their lives and ministries and which we need as well.

John 13:1-17

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. **2** During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, **3** Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, **4** rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. **5** Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. **6** He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" **7** Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." **8** Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." **9** Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" **10** Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." **11** For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." **12** When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? **13** You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. **14** If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **15** For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. **16** Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. **17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Let us notice that in this wonderful text Jesus is washing His disciples' feet in order to illustrate what He will be doing in His crucifixion, namely, laying aside the accouterments of His glory and taking on the very form of a servant. In this stunning event in Jesus' life, we learn some very important things about His love.

I. **Jesus teaches us how much He loves us (vv.1-5)**

In these verses, Jesus reveals several aspects of His love for us.

A. His love is intentional (v. 1)

You can see from verse 1 that this event happens intentionally during the Feast of Passover, that Jesus knew His hour had come, that He was loving "his own." Nothing here is by accident, and nothing in His love for us is accidental.

B. His love is gracious (v. 2)

It is amazing that Jesus washes the feet even of Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him and yet He washed his feet along with the other disciples. This ought to give us motivation in our love for those who would harm us—even ISIS or others in the world.

C. His love is doxological (v. 3).

Notice that Jesus' love for us takes nothing away from His devotion to His Father; in fact, everything Jesus does for us is because of His love for His Father. Jesus does not take

the role of the servant because of low self-esteem, but, rather, because of His absolute confidence in His relationship with His Father.

D. His love is humble (vv. 4-5)

In order for Jesus to serve us as He did, He must take the lowest place. This is beautifully described for us in Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” We see that when Jesus takes off His outer garments (v. 4), He prophetically acts out the incarnation and when He washes the disciples’ feet, He acts out the event of Calvary, where He washed our sins away by His blood. This was all accomplished by His great humility.

II. **We must react appropriately to His love (vv. 6-17)**

A. We must receive His love (vv. 6-11)

We, like Peter, in verses 6-8, naturally recoil from Jesus washing our feet. It’s embarrassing. It’s humiliating that someone of His stature must stoop to our filthy need. But Jesus insists that He must wash us in order for us to have “a share” with Him.

B. We must give His love to each other (vv. 13-17)

In these verses Jesus gives us His instruction, His rationale, and His promise to us.

1. His instruction (vv. 12-15)

His instruction is that just as He has humbled Himself and washed our feet, we must also wash one another’s feet. In some traditions this has become almost a sacrament, but it seems clear that Jesus is not instructing us to wash feet as a regular ritual within the church, but rather that we serve one another in humility throughout the body of Christ. This instruction will change all of our relationships in a dramatic way.

2. He gives a rationale (v. 16)

His rationale is simple. He is greater than we are, and He has humbled Himself; therefore, we must humble ourselves.

3. He gives us a wonderful promise (v. 17)

He promises us that we are blessed, not if we know the truth, but if we actually do it. If we humble ourselves before one another, God will exalt us in due time (see Matthew 5:5; 1 Peter 5:6).

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Jesus wash the feet of His disciples?
2. What are we to learn from this amazing episode in the life of Jesus?
3. What about this event amazes you the most?
4. As with Peter in verses 6-8, why are we sometimes reluctant to receive the love of Christ?

5. How do you explain the actions of Judas?
6. Why is humble service toward fellow believers essential for Christians?

Going Deeper

1. In what ways do you need to open your heart to the gracious, humble love of Jesus?
2. In what specific ways can you more radically share Jesus' humble, gracious love with others?