

John 13:1-20

And... we're back! Hopefully you enjoyed your two week break from Bible study because we're going to finish the summer strong as we head into the second half of the Gospel of John: the week leading up to the death of Jesus and his resurrection.

We join our Lord and his disciples on Thursday, on the day before the feast of the Passover. Pay attention to how John's account of the evening meal differs from that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke and be ready to answer the questions: why and what does this mean?

13:1

This is the caption for the rest of this chapter, and really for most of the rest of the Gospel. John reminds us that Jesus' hour had come. Jesus spoke about the time for his hour to come in the last chapter, as he linked his being lifted-up with the coming of his hour and the coming of all people to him. It is no accident that John wants the shadow of the cross hanging over this meal. It is a solemn occasion to the reader, although the disciples probably knew nothing about what was about to come.

John also tells us that what is to come will be how Jesus loves his own... you and me.

13:2

People have a keen interest in Judas. I've heard more than a few ask something along the lines of: "if Judas was predestined to betray Jesus, and therefore had no choice in the matter, is it really fair that he be punished eternally?" I've also heard people say that Judas' act of suicide was really an act of faith, as he became so sorry for what he did to Jesus that his despair led to his suicide.

I don't want to rehearse the predestination discussion, or the possibility of someone of faith to commit suicide (or even the role mental illness plays with suicide). Instead, I simply want to say this: the grain of Scripture runs in the direction of painting nothing but a negative picture of Judas. Any favorable view of him runs opposite the grain of Scripture.

13:3

Let's spend a minute thinking about what we would do if we had "all things into his hands" (other than make a children's song about it). Aside from fast cars, cool houses, and trips to the moon and Mars, what good things would we want to accomplish? End poverty, cure diseases, world peace...

What we are about to see is what God does when he does what he wants to do. And... as you'd expect by this point, it's not at all what you'd expect.

13:4

To start with, Jesus (who has all things in his hands, and can do whatever he wants) takes on the role of a servant. (Which is why one of the readings this weekend is the passage from Philippians 2 which speaks about the humility of Christ, taking the very nature of a servant and humbling himself to the point of death.)

13:5

Not only does Jesus appear as a servant, he actually does the work of a servant. He will explain the meaning of these actions in the verses that follow...

13:6

Simon Peter points out the absurdity of what is happening. The Lord is going to wash the feet of his disciples? The master the feet of the servants? This does not happen. Ever. And for many reasons. Begs the question: why is Jesus doing this?

13:7

The question then becomes: is this something that the reader of the gospel should be able to understand, or are Jesus' words here meant to tell us not to read into what he did until we have more information with which to make sense of it?

Jesus is doing the work of a servant for the disciples. This is way out of place and must have had tremendous shock value (witness Peter's response to it). So if cleaning the disciples feet was way out of place for the Lord, imagine how out of place it was for him to hang on a cross for the sins of the disciples, yours and mine. The Holy One of Israel, the Son of the Father being treated with the contempt due the most vile offender. Here Jesus chooses to behave like a servant and it appalls us; soon, however, we will choose to treat Jesus like the worst sinner in history.

13:8

Why is it that Peter has "no share" with Jesus if he does not let Jesus symbolically wash his feet? Certainly Peter's eternal destiny does not hinge on his response to this symbolic gesture Jesus makes... or does it?

What's at play is how Peter views Jesus' role. Is Jesus' primary purpose to have us worship him, or is it for him to serve us? Often in the church we are told the purpose of coming together for worship is to worship the Lord... to give him our very best. In this view, God is primarily a being we are to fear and worship. Jesus turns this primary understanding of him and his Father on its head.

Jesus wants Peter to see him as someone who has come to be a blessing to Peter through serving him. Now, in washing his feet. Soon in his death. Ultimately when he raises him from the dead.

Yes, God is to be worshiped and praised. But that comes only as a response to what God has done for us: served us to the point of death, even death on a cross. This understanding of who God is and what he came to earth to do is scandalous... some would even say sacrilegious. But this is one of the mysteries of the cross, which the hymn writer puts well: "the shepherd dies for sheep who love to wander."

13:9

In typical Petrine fashion, the disciple goes from one extreme to the other. Would that our zeal to be washed clean by the Lord be as great as Peter's... and our joy in the cleansing we have received be just as fervent!

13:10

Jesus moves the discussion away from ritual washing and purification to the betrayal of Judas. And so shall we...

13:11

Imagine you knew that one of your friends was plotting to have you killed; what would you do?

What did Jesus do?

13:12

He will explain in the following verses what it is he has done for them.

13:13

Jesus begins explaining what he has done for the disciples by teaching them (again) who he is. It is not from a position of weakness that he has washed their feet; it is not because of any greatness in the disciples themselves that he has washed their feet.

13:14-15

The lesson is a simple one: if Jesus isn't too good for anything, how much less his STUDENTS should think there is ANYTHING that is below them. Oh sure, the world may accord us a status that gives us perks a-plenty. But this does not mean we have to take the world seriously, or always lean on the status it has bestowed on us. We are servants of The Servant. And we are livening in a fantasy if we think that we are too good for anything.

Unfortunately, many pastors have used their office as a source of pride and position that they believe entitles them to perks in the church (and, even worse, in the world) that others should not enjoy. Pompous and arrogant, these men (and some women) look condescendingly on the very people who have called them to their office, pay their salary, and whom the Lord has given them the privilege to shepherd. Instead of joyfully sharing and teaching what they have been privileged to learn about their Lord, they look with scorn on those who have not already learned it.

Getting back to the point: if we want to rightfully be called a disciple of the Lord Jesus, we cannot look down on anyone, or claim to be too good for anything. Period.

13:16

If we claim that we are too good for a person, group of people, activity, etc. we are trying to place ourselves in a position over the Lord Jesus. For if he came "not to be served but to serve," and we go through life thinking people owe us something—that we have a right to be served, we are claiming a place over the Lord Jesus (who was content to be a servant). In claiming rank over other people we are attempting to claim a rank over the Lord Jesus. In doing so, we vainly attempt to make ourselves God. (Yes, I am aware that this is Law.)

13:17

The things that we are to know (from what Jesus has said) are:

- Jesus is rightly called "Teacher" and "Lord."
- We ought to "wash one another's feet."
- Jesus has given us an example to follow.

- And then, the big one (as is shown by it being introduced by: “TRULY, TRULY”) : “a servant is not greater than his master.”

We are blessed because we know our place. We know our place because we know Jesus’ place. We are free to serve and free to follow the example set by Jesus.

13:18

It’s interesting that Jesus does not give the freedom to serve to all people; only to those who are his. In other words, we should not be surprised when the world does not understand why we act the way we do (not being too good for anything). Nor should we be surprised when people use the position and status they have been given as a means of elevating themselves above others. We should not be surprised when people want to be served instead of serving others.

Jesus again comes back to the betrayal that is at hand. Judas is about to do his Judas thing.

13:19

Jesus warned his disciples about the betrayal of Judas (leading to his arrest and execution) so that the disciples wouldn’t think that this was something unplanned or a defeat.

Dispensationalists have a hard time with this passage. They believe Jesus’ purpose of coming into the world was to establish a physical kingdom. They believe he failed in doing this when he was executed. Now, they believe, the door of salvation is opened to Gentiles until the Lord returns and establishes what he set out to establish the first time around: an earthly kingdom, complete with temple sacrifices and priesthood. (We don’t have time to get into all the reasons why this is wrong.) But here Jesus is saying that he is aware that he is going to be betrayed AND THAT THIS IS PART OF THE PLAN!

13:20

The question then is: who is it that Jesus will send? Stay tuned!