

Text: John 13

Title: Humble Service for Humble Servants

Truth: Jesus is the ultimate example of a servant to His followers.

Date/Location: Sunday September 20, 2020 at FBC

Introduction

John 13 is the opening chapter of the section commonly called “The Upper Room Discourse.” This section spans chapters 13 through 17. The narrative outline of the passage looks like this:

- A. Washing of the disciples’ feet: an example of service... 13:1-17
- B. The betrayer predicted and revealed 13:18-30
- C. Jesus announces his imminent departure 13:31-33, 36
- D. New commandment: love one another 13:34-35
- E. Peter wishes to follow Christ but will fall..... 13:37-38

The application outline is as follows:

- A. I must follow the Lord’s example of humble service 13:1-17
- B. I may *seem* close to Christ yet not be a Christian 13:18-30
- C. I must wait to be with Jesus..... 13:31-33, 36
- D. My faith is evidenced when I love other Christians..... 13:34-35
- E. Denying Christ is a possibility, so I must be humble 13:37-38

I noted that section E is closely related to section C.

I. Washing the Disciples’ Feet: Humble service, 13:1-17

A. **Jesus’ humble service arises out of his love for the disciples, v. 1.** John comments that Jesus knew He was about to leave the world. That is, He knew the time had come for his self-sacrifice, death, burial, resurrection, and soon his departure to Heaven. (I cannot imagine knowing all that is to come upon me in advance of it; think of the anxiety that would bring in a circumstance like the Lord’s.)

He had loved those men in a spiritual and wholesome way. He had concerned for their spiritual development, their understanding of the truth, their escape from the clutches of sin, their focus on winning others by fishing them out of the dark world in which they lived.

The text adds that He loved them to the very end. This does not speak to the *timing* of his love—because we already know that it is the end of the Lord’s ministry—but rather to the *extent* of his love. He loved them perfectly, in a complete way, to a point of fullness. He displayed His love for them to the full extent by showing them an example of humble

service by washing their feet, *and then* an example of even more lowly service in dying for them (Phil. 2:5-11).

- B. Jesus' humble service was done even for the benefit of Judas, v. 2.** Just a short note here: Verse 2 mentions that the devil already put it into Judas's heart to betray Jesus. Jesus knew who it was who would betray Him. Yet the text indicates that Judas did not go out until later in the meal (13:26-30). So, it appears that Jesus washed not only the 11 disciples' feet, but also, He washed the betrayer's feet. How could Judas not be convicted by this act of pure, selfless love? His depravity prevented him from seeing the obvious.
- C. Jesus offered humble service even though He was going to God, v. 3.** He is the Son of God, had come from God, was going to God, and knew that the Father had delivered to him all things. He had given and would give Him all authority. He gave to the Son the authority to lay down his life and to take it again (John 10:18). He was the greatest man who ever lived.
- D. Jesus' humble service was in stark contrast to the disciples,** who around this time (either before or soon after) were arguing about who of them was the greatest. See Luke 22:21-24. While they are thinking about that kind of thing, the Lord is about to wash their feet. How embarrassing it should have been (hopefully was) for them as they considered the sober timing of the moment, their own petty disputations, and the Lord's deep love for each of them expressed in lowly service. By the way, the disciples argued about the same thing some months earlier, and even jockeyed for position at the right and left hand of our Lord. This was recorded in Mark 9:34 and 10:37, so around the Last Supper was not the first time for this kind of greedy sinfulness.
- E. Jesus' humble service was displayed in a necessary but lowly way, v. 4-5.** The common footwear of the day was a kind of sandal. It was not fancy or advanced like what we might think of today. It certainly had an open design, so one's feet would become very dirty walking on dirt roads and paths and fields all the time. No roads were "paved" at that time, although some Roman roads had a rock surface and were designed with slope and drainage. Even so, dirty feet were common, and it was the practice of hospitality that a servant at the host home would wash the feet of the people there. This would be a pleasant experience and would help the "atmosphere" as the guests reclined around the table!

Think about the mechanics of how this was done.

F. Peter often spoke what the other disciples were thinking. So, when it came to his turn, he asked the Lord a question which indicated that he would not allow the Lord to wash his feet. He at least had enough boldness to say what the others were realizing—that it was ridiculous that they did not offer to wash Jesus’ feet and those of the other disciples! **Jesus’ humble service gave Him an opportunity to teach TWO truths to the disciples, v. 6-11.** Neither of these lessons did the disciples understand at that precise moment.

1. The first lesson symbolized by the foot washing comes immediately. Jesus spoke about cleansing in terms of **bathing** and **washing**. We understand that difference. A **bath** or shower has one purpose; and **washing** of the hands throughout the day has another design. Jesus told Peter that the one who is bathed (saved, forgiven of sin) only needs to have his feet washed. Peter wants to carry the foot washing a bit farther then, if washing means you can be in a favored relationship with Jesus Christ. The more washing the better, in his mind.

But salvation is not a repeated activity. Foot-washing is a figure of cleansing that is required on a regular basis. The foot-washing therefore is a symbol of daily cleansing from sin. See 1 John 1:7 which speaks of this continual cleansing of daily sin, not the one-time bathing that washes us clean of the guilt and power of sin. It must have been a real “Aha!” moment for Peter and the others when they grasped this concept. It still is difficult for some believers to grasp—that there is a difference between the forgiveness of salvation and the forgiveness of our relationship with God through Christ.

2. The second lesson is explained in verses 12-17.

G. **Jesus’ humble service also was designed as an example to the disciples, v. 12-17.** He asked them if they understood what he had done for them. Despite the proper and well-deserved reverence, He received as Teacher and Master and Lord and Rabbi, He washed their feet. As the master teacher, he taught them an embarrassing lesson by doing it himself. He specifically tells them that he has given them an example/model/pattern for them to follow.

This is not an ordinance, but it is a divinely ordained pattern. It is not carried out by actual foot-washing in our context because that is not a needed form of service. It is not service to do an unneeded service! There are other forms of service, as many different ones as you can think of. If a believer needs help with something, that fits.

II. The Betrayer: We must be genuine in our faith, 13:18-30

A. The betrayer is predicted, v. 18-21.

1. Jesus says that in what He has spoken up to now has not been directed at all the disciples. Rather, only the chosen ones are spoken of in the passage about being clean and being servants and following Jesus's example. He knew the ones he had chosen. These were the 11, and perhaps others such as any ladies who were helping to serve the supper.
2. This choosing is not merely the selection of the disciples to be apostles as described in Luke 6:13. There He chose 12 to minister with Him. Here, He is indicating a subset of that 12 who were beneficiaries of a more specific "choosing." This selection is about salvation as well as apostleship. See John 15:16, 19 and Acts 9:15. Stepping back one more level, we can see a correlation between this choosing and the election of every true believer to salvation (Mat. 20:16; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 2:4, 9; Rev. 17:14).
3. The Scripture that our Lord quoted is found in Psalm 41:9. Some readers will immediately conclude that this verse or the entire Psalm must be a prophecy about Christ. But this approach will lead them badly astray because the Psalm is not a prophecy at all. It is a general statement of King David about the righteous. Read the Psalm and see! There is no way a reader in David's day could have deduced that this Psalm was actually about the Messiah. Rather, it is about godly people. The rectitude of the godly person is proven by his behavior toward the poor. David is confident that God will protect the righteous, despite many enemies that seek to do him harm. Among those enemies is even numbered one who was known as a friend. This status made his later opposition even more galling. Still, David trusts in the Lord and God delivers Him.
4. And this is the point of parallel or "fulfillment" as Jesus calls it. Jesus did not consider this fulfillment as making a prophecy come to pass, nor did He consider it as changing the meaning of the Psalm from its "surface meaning" to a "deeper meaning." He regarded His life and present situation as the ultimate example of a righteous person who received the kind of treatment that sinners give to righteous people. In that sense, He perfectly fit the pattern of that lament and song of trust in the divine deliverer. Judas was about to betray Him. This man had spent years with the Messiah and had no excuse. To "lift up the heel" against one is a strong expression of opposition. Judas was not

just ambivalent. He was actively angry and hated Christ. He loved money more than loyalty, more than God, more than his friend.

5. All of that concerns verse 18. In verse 19, the Lord says something to prepare the disciples to believe in Him. This is interesting. You see the same thing in John 11:42 where the Lord said some public words in order that the people might believe that the Father sent the Son into the world. Here, he is giving a prophecy so that when it comes to pass, they will recognize Jesus for who He is (Deut. 13:1-18, but especially the opening verses, and 18:22). What better way for someone to tell you in advance what is going to happen or what has happened—with no other knowledge of it, with no hidden human insight—and to do so on multiple occasions over several years. Think of the Nathaniel incident in John 1:48, or predicting Lazarus's resurrection, or this, or the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ that he prophesied (Matt. 16:21).
6. Now the Lord speaks a general truth that has wide application to all ages, not just this situation (v. 20). The Lord has sent messengers into the world. People who receive (welcome, embrace) those messengers demonstrate that they welcome Christ. In turn, those who welcome Christ show that they also welcome and embrace God the Father, who is the One who sent Christ. See John 5:23, Matt 10:40, Mark 9:37, Luke 9:48, 10:16, John 12:44. Let us assume faithful (not perfect) messengers of God, like pastors and missionaries. They preach Christ. If people will not take heed, then they demonstrate that they do not receive Christ, nor do they receive God. There is no way someone can say, "I don't agree with his message about the gospel, and I don't much care for Christ, but I do believe in God." That is an offensive statement before the holy God.

B. The betrayer is identified, v. 22-27.

1. Christ is a person and as anyone, would obviously be troubled that someone is going to betray him. Imagine if you close friend or family member "turned you in" for being a Christian or worshipping. How terrible. Even worse if you know you will be tortured and crucified and buried within hours. Less than 24 hours after this saying, Jesus would be in the tomb.
2. He stated plainly that one of them would be a betrayer. Before, He said that "not all" of them were clean. He used a quote of Scripture to indicate that someone would lift up his heel. But now Jesus says it plainly. One of their own number will be the betrayer. The disciples

are obviously perplexed about this because they are thinking (with the exception of Judas), “Who would do such a thing?” They were about to learn the nature of human depravity. If they had the notion that mere closeness to Jesus or religious things would avail anything of value, this shocking turn of events would correct their thinking forever.

3. Peter somehow discreetly signaled to John to ask who it was. John was sitting next to Jesus and asked Him. The situation was a awkward, to say the least, but the Lord wanted the disciples to know who it was, so He told them it would be the person to whom He gave a piece of bread. So He did not say the name out loud, but John and subsequently Peter and the rest of the disciples understood.

4. After Jesus gave the bread to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, He told Judas to quickly accomplish what was ordained for him to do.

C. The disciples are confused, v. 28-30. No one at the table knew what Jesus was talking about. Verse 28 opens with the same perplexity that verse 22 expressed. So, they speculated (instead of waiting to find out!) They wondered if Judas had to go do something with the finances that he held because he was the treasurer. Perhaps he had to buy something for the rest of the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. Or, perhaps he was to give something to the poor to support them in the holy time of year.

Note, by the way, that Judas had the money box. He pilfered what was offered to the Lord and disciples (John 12:6). But he was not satisfied with that. People like him are never satisfied. They always want more. So he went to get 30 pieces of silver from the priests to betray Jesus. And what did it buy him? A dirty conscience.

Verse 30 says that Judas went out immediately. That was the last the disciples would have to do with him.

D. Application. I have alluded to two applications already: avoiding greed, and acknowledging that there are false disciples who are sometimes seem very close to the things of God. But we need to hone in on those ideas a little bit more. Those problems can be OURS. Some among us may be greedy. Some of us may be false disciples, willing to sell our church brothers and sisters for a few bucks or 15 minutes of fame.

We need to check up on ourselves that we are genuinely in the faith. I’m not trying to scare anyone unnecessarily. But if you need to be scared, be scared. While Jesus offers to cleanse you entirely by his cross-work and wash your feet daily, do you sit there like a stone and ignore your

conscience? (Like Judas did when his feet were washed?) Do you think you shall escape divine judgment because of your attendance at religious functions? Do you think you'll be ok because of your parents faith? Or because you are a "pretty good" person? None of that is the gospel of Jesus Christ!

III. Jesus is leaving: We cannot be with Him immediately, 13:31-33, 36

- A. Once Judas has left, the "real" upper room discourse can begin. The Lord can unfold truth to the disciples without the hindrance of the Devil, in effect, being in their midst indwelling Judas.
- B. In verses 31-32, Jesus speaks of His own impending glorification. In verse 31, He speaks of it as if it has just now occurred, yet in verse 32 He speaks of it as future. The two "tenses" are harmonized by recognizing that as soon as Judas went out, the wheels were set in motion for God's plan of redemption in Christ to be culminated. Jesus knew that the betrayal would occur and that would begin all the "bad" events of the upcoming hours.

In the work of redemption, the Son of Man would be exalted (glorified, "lifted up" but not in the physical sense). God the Father would be honored (glorified) in the person of the Son of Man. Consequently, God would also glorify the Son of Man in the Father and do so immediately. The phrasing of this may get you turned around, but it means that the Son and the Father would be glorified by and with each other before mankind.

We must keep this in mind: no matter that Christ is absent, for He is glorified. He is to be greatly honored for the work of redemption.

- C. Now that the plan was in motion, Jesus would only be with the disciples a little longer. Just a few hours, perhaps, until He was betrayed and arrested, after which He would have no contact with the disciples other than eye contact with Peter (Luke 22:61). Perhaps he saw a couple of the other disciples, but basically, he was left alone. The sheep were scattered (Mark 14:27). Then, He will be killed, and His body will be placed in the grave. After a short stint in the land of the living, then He will go to Heaven, and the disciples will not be able to follow Him there, at least not immediately.
- D. Correlate with other passages. See John 7:33-36, 8:21-24. Related is the text in John 16:16-22. This speaks of Jesus going away in His death, and then shortly afterward being resurrected. So the disciples would at first not be able to see Him; then again they would be able to. But then again

after His ascension they would not be able to see Him. They would have to wait until death or until the Lord's return as described by the angels in Acts 1:11.

- E. This reality of an absent Jesus demands patience on our part. If we feel nothing about His absence, that shows we really do not know the Lord. For if you know Him, you want to be close to Him. Given that we do know Christ, then the true believer must learn a measure of patience for the hope that is to be revealed when salvation is brought to its full flower (Roman 8:18-24; 1 Pet 1:5, 4:13, 5:1).
- F. Peter is not as well-informed at that moment as we are now. Therefore, in verse 36 he asks the question about where Jesus is going. He does not realize Jesus is going to go through what He had said before in Matt 16:21 and then go to heaven. But John 16:10 and 28 point out that the focus is not on Heaven per se; rather, it is on the *Father* in heaven. Jesus is going back to the Father, from whence He came originally. He will be glorified with the Father with the glory He had before the world was (John 17:5).

That needs to color our thinking as well. The important thing is not that we are going to heaven! The important thing is that we are going to be with Jesus (1 Thess. 4:17, John 14:3) and with God the Father. Wherever that is will be fine. It turns out that it will be at first in the intermediate heaven of the present age, and then on the earth during the kingdom reign of Christ, and in eternity it will be on the new earth and (somehow) in the new Heaven. But the exact *where* is not important. What is important is the inter-personal connection and presence.

- G. Peter could not go at that time, but he would follow afterward. What a promise for a believing person! The timing was not good enough for Peter, but with patience, it should be good enough for us who are true believers.

IV. Loving One Another: The Primary Attribute of Believers, 13:34-35

- A. Instead of concerning themselves with staying with Christ or going where He is going, the Lord gives them their proper focal point: loving one another. While awaiting the Lord's re-appearance, the disciples' job is to love one another.
- B. This is a "new commandment" not in the sense that it has never been given before. It was given before, e.g. in Lev. 19:18 (and a negative form in Zech. 8:17). But this was more specific—love *one another*—and it was qualified in terms of the type of love—as *I have loved you*.

1. Christians are to have a particular affection and love toward one another. When that is not present, something serious is wrong. When you think evil of a person, or attribute evil to that person, or think up all the permutations of how they are wronging you, or the like—then you are not loving that brother or sister.
 2. Christians are to exercise that love in a way that is comparable to how Christ loved us. Jesus gave His life for us (John 10:11, 1 John 3:16, John 15:13) and so models a self-sacrificial kind of love.
- C. The proof of discipleship is in the fruit of discipleship, and that fruit is all the different manifestations of love that one has for another. That fruit is what will show to other disciples, and other not-yet-disciples, and other not-disciples, that we are genuinely followers of the real Jesus. Our care for one another; how we stick together in helping one another; our ability to forgive one another; our ability to overlook faults; and so forth all combine to demonstrate to Whom we are connected.

Note that our love for one another does not point ultimately to ourselves as individuals or as a group, as if we are some great assembly of people. Nay, rather, our love for each other points to the one Whom we follow, Jesus Christ. For one who does not yet know the Lord, our love should be a model that beautifully adorns the gospel to make it attractive to the outsider. When God draws someone to Himself, that person should be able to see “what he is getting into” when he comes to the church. He is getting into a community of people who love one another.

D. Me? You?

V. Peter Predicted to Fail: We too can Fail, 13:37-38

- A. We can sympathize with Peter in his desire to follow Christ, even to the point of death. He was a loyal follower, although he was too confident in his strength to handle what was coming.
- B. But his inability to handle the difficulty of the situation was not the only reason that he could not follow Christ at this point. First, Jesus had already said, *twice* (v. 33 and 36) that Peter could not follow Him now. That would be enough. But further than that, John 21:18-19 explains that the Lord had a future plan for Peter that could only be fulfilled if Peter *did not* follow Him at the time. Peter had another part of his life to live—three decades or so—to glorify Christ.
- C. Instead of a Peter-glorifying last stand to the death at this point in time, Jesus prophesied that Peter would not die for Christ, but would deny

Christ. What a deep cut that was to Peter, if he was sensitive enough to listen to what the Lord was saying. Not only would Peter deny the Lord three times, but he would do it within the space of just the next few hours. The sin nature of Peter would overtake him, and he would be unable to conquer its desire for personal comfort and safety.

- D. If Peter can fail, we can fail. Peter was with the Lord for years. He was a believer. Heaven had revealed to Peter about Jesus being the Christ (Matt 16:16-17). He later was a powerful preacher of the Word. We might chalk up his failure to the theology of the Spirit—like there was no Holy Spirit ministry in his life until Pentecost. I do not think it is that easy. The Spirit of God simply *had* to be working in Peter’s life for him to be able to recognize Jesus for Who He was, and to want to follow Christ. Those were not mere fleshly desires. Indeed the Spirit of God had not come, in accord with John 7:37-39, but this does not mean He was totally absent from Peter’s life. The real point is that the sin nature inside of each one of us is so insidious, so dark, so sinful, so twisted, so deceptive, that it can work the same mischief inside of us that it worked in Peter.

The devil is not omnipresent like God is, so we cannot blame him entirely for Peter’s fault. The devil played some role, however, as described in Luke 22:31-34. Note that Satan wanted to sift **all** of them, not just Peter.

- E. How do we guard against failure? Staying close to Christ, spiritually speaking. Maintaining our reading in the Word and prayer and fellowship with other believers. Go away for a while from a sound fellowship and you may observe yourself slipping into sin.

Conclusion

The first big section of the chapter has to do with Christ’s example of humble service and his command to love one another. His own service arose out of His love for the disciples. He is commanding them to do exactly what He has demonstrated already to them by loving one another. He gives them this task during the interval of his absence, instead of thinking that they are going to beam up to Heaven immediately to be with Christ. They have a ministry on earth, which we know will encompass the Great Commission, but it also has a heavy element of one-anotherness to it in the life of the church.

It is tough to summarize the chapter because it does not seem to fit cleanly under a single heading.