

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

John 13:1-5

Jesus Loves Through Serving

For the next few months, we are studying the Upper Room Discourse and the High Priestly prayer. John 13-17. This morning, we come to the very familiar story of our Lord washing the disciple's feet. Because of its familiarity, we especially need to depend on the Holy Spirit as we study this passage. Jesus speaks much about the Holy Spirit in this passage and His role in our lives. Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth. And because the Spirit is truth, he teaches us the truth and He reminds us of the truth. In practical terms, this means the Holy Spirit gives us new insights into the Word of God, so we grow both in our knowledge of the Word and in our living for the Lord.

There are times when truth is familiar, but the Holy Spirit comes alongside and reminds us of what we've already been taught and fills what we've been taught with fresh insight. He shows us as we ponder the Word, new ways to apply familiar truth. I belabor this point because many of us are familiar with the story. *O Holy Spirit, give freshness to what is familiar to me and show me new ways I can live your truth for the glory of Jesus.* Listen as I read this familiar passage,

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing,

and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:1-5)

This morning we will focus on what Jesus says and does. I will skip verses six through 11 as those verses are weighty that they deserve their own sermon in the near future. But today I want us to see three truths about the Lord Jesus.

The Saving Love of Jesus

"It was just before the Passover festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world and go to the father having loved his own, who were in the world. He loved them to the end" (John 13:1)

Jesus knew his hour had come. This was the long-expected hour, the supreme hour in his life. No other hour that has ever occurred in history is more significant than this hour. It is the hour Jesus will go to the cross for the sins of humanity.

At the beginning of John's Gospel, just before Jesus performs his first miracle of turning water into wine, He says to his mother, "My hour has not yet come." Then at the end of the Gospel our Lord is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane "Father, if it is your will, let this cup pass from me yet not my will, but yours be done." And it was not the will of the Father to take the cup away from his Son—the cup of wrath that he must drink for us.

But when Jesus comes to his disciples, he says, "My hour has now come." And the very next thing that happens is that Jesus is betrayed, arrested, tried, and crucified. The ultimate hour, the expected hour, is, this moment in history when he dies a sacrificial death to take our sin upon himself. He gets the wrath, and we get the grace. His hour has come.

And when he's talking about that hour, we read, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the *end*." It's a word that can be easily translated, "He loved them to the uttermost degree". He loved them with the full capacity of his love. He loved them on the cross. In the Book of Revelation, we read a doxology of praise to Jesus, "to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his own blood."

Jesus loves his own to the end of his life, filled with pain, agony, and the cross. He is the sin-bearer. Jesus love them through the end of their lives when he would bring them into glory. The whole reason the Lord Jesus came into this world was for this supreme hour of sin-bearing crucifixion. To die for your sins and mine—his own.

And Jesus in the upper room knows this. He knows that the hour has come. The shadows of the cross are consuming Jesus.

The Authority of Jesus

This brings us to the second thing he knew. He knew he was God. He knew He was the Almighty, all-knowing Lord. And hence, we see Jesus' Sovereign Authority. Look closely at verses two and three. "The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God."

The Lord Jesus is conscious that the enemy of humanity is active in the life of one of his own. He knows that Judas has been lied to by Satan and that Satan had moved in Judas' soul such that Judas is inclined to betray Jesus. Jesus also knows that at this supreme hour, he possesses total power from God the Father and that the power of God is upon Him. It is always necessary for us to remember that when Jesus went to the cross, he did not go to the cross as an unwilling victim. Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus says, "No one takes my life, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." And here in the Upper Room, knowing that Satan is at work in the heart of one of his own, to betray him, Jesus possesses omniscience. He knew he had power.

There is an interesting verse at the end of John chapter two, "Jesus knew what was in the hearts of all men. He needed no one to tell him the thoughts and the intentions of people, for he possesses total knowledge." He is the Lord God omniscient. And we see here that he also has all authority and power available to him. He does not have a withered arm. Jesus is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we are willing to contribute to His capacity to do. Not only is He the Lord omniscient, as he is called in Revelation, but he is also the Lord God omnipotent who reigns supreme. What is the next activity of this Lord, this sovereign one, this Holy one, Almighty and all-knowing God?

The Selfless Humility of Jesus

Well, verse four tells us. "He got up from the meal," this mighty king of glory and grace, and "laying aside his outer garments, tying around his waist a large towel, and taking a basin filled with water." He washes the feet of his disciples. The one with saving Love and supreme authority and power available to him gets up and commits an act of selfless, humble service.

It was commonplace in the ancient world for people to walk and travel dusty roads. These roads were traveled by animals and people. They were dusty and filthy. Every day a servant took a basin and towel to clean the dirty, smelly, grimy feet of guests.

In the upper room, there was no servant on duty, and no disciple volunteered to wash the feet of the others, though that would have been appropriate. They simply sat there and that's when Jesus got up. And if you think about it in terms of movement, Jesus got up so He could go down.

He stood tall and dressed in the garb of a servant. So he could go low and bow with the feet of humans. And if you know anything about Jesus he never did anything halfway, 24 feet in that room, covered in dirt and grime and filth. And the Lord Jesus takes each foot into his hands. He looks and he pours water over and he washes those feet. I say, even washing the encrusted dirt between the toes! Visualize this. This is a humbling act of service Jesus willingly performs. I wonder how long it takes to wash 24 feet? Well, that's what Jesus did. And by his example, he teaches us that it is our calling to go low.

In verse 12, we read, “when he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you? He asks them. You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so. For that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

Jesus begins the explanation of his action of washing feet with a question. It is a profound question. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” That's the sort of question all of us need to consider seriously and deeply. We need to pray over it. But this is especially true for the disciples in that upper room.

A few days earlier, before they arrive in Jerusalem and go into that upper room, these very disciples get into an argument. John and James, the sons of Zebedee, want first place in the Kingdom of God. They want to be known as the greatest in the Kingdom of God. So they argue about who is the greatest, and the other ten become indignant. They're vying for first place. And Jesus addresses them. And when they are quiet, listen to what Jesus says, “Very truly I say unto you, he who would be first must be the slave of all, and he who wishes to be great in the Kingdom of God must serve all.”

Look around. A servant of all. You know, there is a man in 3 John 9, who is causing trouble in the church. His name is Diotrephes and the epithet over his life reads, “who loves to be first.” “Diotrephes, who loves to be first.” Imagine this statement being read Sunday after Sunday for over 2000 years. He wanted to be the great one. He wanted to be the one known for his zeal for the Lord. He wanted to be in charge. He coveted the accolades.

But just a few verses later (3 John 12) we read about Demetrius. “Well-spoken of by everyone” — a godly example of a faithful servant. How dangerous it is to covet the accolades of others, to want to be seen and known as the first and the greatest. So when Jesus says to these particular disciples, “Do you understand what I have done?” Imagine how the disciples felt after seeing Jesus perform this menial task and hearing Him say, “If you want to be great, you've got to be the servant. Do you understand what I just did for you? I just gave you an example of what I taught you when you were arguing over who would be the greatest.” And then Jesus says this, “If I am your master, you will do what I have done for you.”

Actually, it's more than that. Jesus said, Let me quote it for you. "You call me teacher and Lord. And so I am. If I your Lord and teacher, wash your feet, you should wash each other's feet." Did you hear Jesus reverse it? You say you call me *teacher and Lord*, rightly so. But then he changes it. "But if I, your *Lord and teacher*." It could be just saying something in a different way.

But if you think about it, it's an interesting little tweak. If I am *your* Lord, and if I am *the* Lord, I have the right to command your life and you must settle on that before I even issue a command. You will do what I say because I'm the Lord. And so when the Lord teaches you and me, we do not have the right to decide if we will embrace His teaching and carry it out. It must be done because He's the Lord and he is saying, "I have served you. I have stood up so that I may bow down. I have gotten up so that I may go low. And you are to do the same thing."

It is right for us to take it this way because one of the men who had their feet washed by Jesus that day was Peter. And at the end of his first epistle, Peter says, "All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." In the Greek lexicon, the idea behind that wore *clothed*, is of a servant clothing himself, tying about his waist, a towel. And Peter is moving that image to the realm of humble service by saying, like Jesus did, "clothe yourself," wrap around you a towel that you may humbly serve all of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

A significant number of you will remember this illustration. I've told it many times, but I really want us to remember what God wants to teach us. In 1978, 45 years ago, I was a freshman student at Columbia Bible College. I am convinced that in the Christian world, the most dangerous people are freshmen students at a Bible college. Because you get to the end of that first semester and you have been drinking in the Bible and theology and all sorts of truth for 14 weeks, you think you can go home and straighten out your church.

One of our professors called the freshman class into the chapel. He was standing encased behind the pulpit. And he told us, "I know you want to go home; you want to share your ideas and what you've learned, and you want to help your church." And then he said, "Take your Bible home, you need to read it, but leave all of your syllabi and all of your books and all of your ideas in the dorm room."

And then he reached under the pulpit and pulled out a towel and a basin. And he said, "Take these home." Just ask your pastor one thing, "How do you want me to serve?" And we all remember that 45 years later. Mr. Braswell was teaching us; *You want to be great to your church? You want to make a difference? Stand up so you can go low. Go up that you may go down at the feet of people and serve them.*

Significantly, Judas left, but the rest of them were sent to be *apostles*, to be the foundation of the Christian Church; to have legitimate rank. And here Jesus is saying to them, regardless of your rank, go low.

John Piper says this, “So, yes, you have a high calling, but no, you are not qualified for it. If you need to hold on to the honors and the prerogatives of rank. the only people suitable to represent Jesus are the lowly, the humble, the servant-like, the self-denying.”

In closing, hear these words from Isaiah,
“For this is what the high and exalted One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
“I live in a high and holy place,
but *also with* the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit” Isaiah 57:15.

May God Himself for the glory of Jesus, turn us into a selflessly humble people who adopt a genuine attitude of servanthood.

Lord, I don't ask that you give us a list of ways we can serve. I ask that you give us a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, who continually points the way. Help us to follow the example of the Lord Jesus to be a people who are not puffed up with rank, but who get up that we might go low for the glory of Jesus and for the good of others. Amen.