

# The Inner Sanctums of Communion

## The Beauty of Jesus Our Eternal Servant – 13:2-5

With John 13:1 as the banner over this entire section we now move to contemplate one of the most moving and significant snapshots of the life and ministry of Jesus – the washing of the feet of immature disciples on the brink of apostasy.

The story of the foot washing is most often spoken of as being instructive. While Jesus was clearly instructing the disciples to do the same, there are broader implications in view here that lead me to believe that it is first **revelatory** before **instructive**. That is, I believe this text reveals the beauty of Jesus in a way that is very unique. It seems clear that John wanted his readers to fix their eyes on this vision of the God-Man before they heard the instruction from Him.

While John desired us to hear the instruction, John would want us to first behold the beauty of Jesus. For John retells this story to present to the humble bondservant the reality of Jesus' eternal servanthood.

### An Outline of the Story

The outline of the storyline looks like this:

John's Preface to the Event – 13:2-3

The Event Itself – 13:4-5

The Conversation with Peter – 13:6-11

The Instructions to the Eleven – 13:12-17

Passages like these call us to quiet meditation and contemplation upon the storyline and narrative. When the storyline becomes clear and our eyes (Eph. 1:17) become fixed upon Jesus, the contemplation of the glory of the events becomes more fluid. Learn to meditate through events like these by replaying them in your mind and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the beauty of Jesus in the particular passage that He intended to be displayed.

### John's Preface to the Washing of the Disciple's Feet

John's introductory words are of great importance to us.

**“During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God...” (John 13:2-3)**

With verse 1 serving as the preamble/preface to the entire **section** (13:1-17:26), verses 2-3 serve as the preamble/preface to this particular **event** of Jesus washing the disciple's feet. In this introductory passages John includes two timing indicators to give context to the account.

He says that the following event took place “during supper” and “when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas...to betray Him.” John is showing us that as the Passover meal was being prepared nationally<sup>1</sup> the true Passover Lamb was being plotted against to be killed.<sup>2</sup> Oh the drama! As each family slaughtered their Passover Lamb within their household, Jesus was preparing Himself and His disciples for His own slaughter the next day. The culmination of so many prophecies, types and shadows was at hand. Judas was plotting, Jesus was preparing and the 11 were profoundly unaware of what was about to happen.

The next thing we read is:

**“...Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God...”**

We must be careful not to read “**although** Jesus knew that the Father had...” The intended meaning of this is “**because** Jesus knew that the Father had...” There are two things to be drawn out from this text for contemplation and meditation: First, Jesus’ omniscience. And second, the fact that Jesus was willing to embrace such a menial and basic task as foot-washing in the face of the great crisis that lay before Him.

The word “know” – or some variation of it – is used repeatedly in this chapter. John is highlighting a very precious truth about Jesus: He knows everything. We read in verse 1 that Jesus “knew” that He was returning to the Father soon. In verse 3 we read that Jesus “knew” these three things that (1) the Father had given all things into His hands, (2) that He had come from God and that (3) He was going to God. In verse 11 we read that Jesus knew that Judas would betray Him. And in verse 18 and following we read that Jesus “knew” whom He had chosen referring to the apostasy of Judas and the perseverance of the 11. He knew that Judas would betray Him and He knew how and when. And in verses 36-37 we read that Jesus knew that Peter would betray Him three times.

The attribute of omniscience is so important when meditating upon the glory of Christ. Some in our day wish to argue that Jesus merely “knows the possibilities” and that the future is “open.” The problem with this bunk theory is two-fold. First, Scripture cannot be any clearer that God is never surprised. And secondly, the fact that He is never surprised is used to vindicate His glory. The book of Isaiah contains the most evidence for this. But we find one here in John 13. Look in verse 19. Jesus says, in effect, “I am telling you about Judas’ apostasy so that when it all comes to pass you will know that I am the Messiah and that my demand of your worship and adoration is completely reasonable. I know everything and nothing is out of my control.”

How these poor souls desire to prove that Jesus can be surprised, thwarted and unaware I do not know. Could you imagine Jesus trying to orchestrate His crucifixion without being sovereign over it? What if Pilate let Him out the back door of His chambers? What if He died from blood loss after His scourging? What if someone hit Him in the temple with a rock when He was marching to Golgotha? What if Judas never betrayed Him?! And what if Annas and Caiaphas –

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 22:7 tells of Jesus’ conversations with the 12 concerning the meal

<sup>2</sup> Judas had already made his agreement with the chief priests – Luke 22:3-6

as apostate as they were – felt to defend Him so that He wouldn't be killed? How could this all be accomplished by a God who is double-crossed by mere men with "free-wills"? Who has more freedom to fulfill His purposes? – God or man? If our answer to that is "man" our contemplation of the glory of Christ is undermined. For His glory has been demeaned by vain philosophy that seeks to honor man over God. John is clear in this chapter: Jesus is not surprised by what's happening here on this night. In fact, we get the feeling that He's completely in control!

Secondly, note the wonder of verse 3 with the washing of feet in view. Jesus Christ, on the eve of the most significant, consequential and incredible hour of human history, knowing of the bloodbath to come before the sun sets the next day, is compelled to disrobe and wash the feet of 12 Jewish young adults – including His betrayer!

Before considering the event itself, consider the juxtaposition of "He knew" what was to come with "He washed their feet." What meekness. Of all the times that Jesus could be justified in withdrawing to a secret place because of the pressure, of all the times that Jesus could be dealing with the prospect of the coming storm and of all the times that He did not need to be engaging in menial tasks, this was it. Soon He would be wrapped in thorns, painted with blood, baptized in wrath and put on display for all to mock and scorn. He would soon pay the penalty for the sin of the world drinking the cup of reeling for every vile blasphemy against God since the flood of Noah until now. He would soon be made a curse and would be reckoned sin in the eyes of the Holy. He would soon be forsaken by all those sitting around Him now. Within 72 hours Judas will be dead, Peter will have denied Jesus with cursing to return to commercial fishing and the other 10 will have forsaken Him.

And yet, in that moment, Jesus, driven by the essence of who He is, saw it necessary to take up one of the most basic jobs imaginable – wash dust, dirt, mud and animal feces off the feet of those who are too weak to stay loyal to Him in the hour of His greatest need. Think of the four things He knows and then think upon what He's doing! He knows that He's "departing from the world," He knows that "the Father has given all things into His hands," He knows He has "come" from His Father and He knows that He is "going" to His Father. In that place, knowing all of that, Jesus chooses to serve sinners who haven't the fortitude to remain with Him.

### **The Act Itself and the Big Picture of the Crucifixion**

In verses 4-5 we read of what actually happened next. Jesus laid His outer garments to the side and proceeded to take a towel and water to wash the disciple's feet. The two most prominent particulars of the text serve as entry points into beholding the glory of the person and work of Christ. For this event was not just about teaching the 12 to be servants. This event was about revealing His glory to the disciples and then teaching them to serve. The two particulars are (1) He disrobed and (2) He served sinners.

If we contemplate what it meant to disrobe our hearts connect with something sublime: the humility of Jesus to lay aside all that He has the right to claim to fulfill this task of redemption. What was possible from Genesis 3 on if God was unwilling to become incarnate? Without condescending to us in the form of a Man, we would be without hope. The efficacy of the sacrificial system was based ONLY on the promise of God to send His Son. Without that

commitment before the sacrifices were instated, they would've had no effect to save. The blood of the animals was but a shadow of what was to come when God Himself would bleed those who have offended Him and provoked His wrath.

John Stott writes:<sup>3</sup>

“Our substitute who took our place and died our death on the cross, was neither Christ alone (since that would make Him a third party thrust in between God and us), nor God alone (since that would undermine the historical incarnation), but God in Christ, who was truly and fully both God and man, and who on that account was uniquely qualified to represent both God and man to mediate between them.”

“For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.”

The humility of Jesus to “disrobe” His deity – while still fully retaining it of course – is paramount in our consideration of the beauty of the Lord. St. Anselm of Canterbury, in his watershed work, writes:

“There is no one who can make this satisfaction [quenching the wrath of God against sin] except God Himself. But no one ought to make it except man; otherwise man does not make satisfaction. Therefore it is necessary that one who is the God-man should make it.”

That was what was required in order to redeem man – incarnation, mediation and substitution. Oh how wonderful these words and truths are! The second particular is Jesus actually serving sinners. The big picture and the take away point here is the fact that Jesus served sinners. This was so much more than an isolated event. It was an event that was to serve to interpret who Jesus was and what His 33 years on the planet were all about. Let's look at a few nuances of the story to draw out the grand implications of it.

Concerning the brevity of the two verses that recall the event, Ross writes: “How touchingly does the evangelist set off the whole scene. There is such a beautiful simplicity, such a graphic minuteness about the description, as to bring up the whole picture before our minds...everything is so minutely recorded.”<sup>4</sup> He disrobes and washes feet. That is really all that is said. But oh how loudly it speaks. The same hands that have received “all things” from the Father are now holding grungy feet.

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<sup>3</sup> Both are quotations from Stott's phenomenal book: *The Cross of Christ*

<sup>4</sup> *The Inner Sanctuary*, pg. 27

Jesus was in His element here. This was not drudgery for Jesus. He delighted in it. We read that He “delights in mercy.” This is mercy if ever we’ve seen it. God doing the very opposite of what men deserve. These 12 deserve death according to His holy law. And yet these 12 receive service. Even Judas! Think of the humility to wash the feet of a betrayer! Jesus was altogether comfortable doing this. He wasn’t like some sham dignitary that bends over to hold a filthy street child for the sake of public renown while despising every minute of it. Jesus isn’t like a spoiled king who wants nothing more than to return to His lavish home where there is no threat, stench or burdens.

Jesus requires that we let Him serve us if we’re to have fellowship with Him. This is one of the most intriguing and breath-taking realities in Scripture. In order to have fellowship and communion with the God we have so offended we must be served by Him. One would think that it would be the opposite! One would think that fellowship would only be possible on the grounds of our humble service to Him! But no! When Peter expressed the logic that we are discussing here by denying Jesus the right to wash his feet, Jesus replied by saying:

**“If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me.” (John 13:8)**

In other words, “Peter if you cannot let Me serve you in this way, what will you do when I shed My blood for you? How will you react to that?” See, the atonement is a service to sinners. It is an act of infinite kindness focused on blessing us with infinite goodness. And if we scorn the atonement, the way Peter is here scorning to have his feet washed, we scorn God Himself. Humility is not stiff arming God when He stoops to serve. Humility is embracing it and adoring Him for it.

The big picture here is not foot washing. It’s crucifixion. This whole event took place so that Jesus could help the boys understand what was about to take place. They had heard Him say “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve”<sup>5</sup> but they were still resisting the truth of it all. Jesus connects foot washing to crucifixion theologically by saying to Peter that if He does not “wash” him, he cannot have fellowship with Him. “Wash” here connotes more than the rinsing of water over dirty skin. We know this because soon after this Jesus says that one of them is not clean – referring to Judas- even though He washes Judas’ feet. “Washing” and being “clean” cannot be limited only to physical foot washing. Jesus was washing feet to point the boys towards His death attempting to give them an interpretation of what will take place on Golgotha. It’s service to sinners.

If we resist Jesus’ ministry of service we resist communion with Him. This means that refusing to fellowship with Him on the basis of our immaturity or besetting sin isn’t actually humility but arrogance; the very thing we think it’s not. Jesus makes us clean. We do not make ourselves clean. Who are you O blood bought sinner to refuse Jesus the right to enjoy and beckon you to commune with Him?

This isn’t to say that sin isn’t offensive to Him or that we can expect to have an intimate relationship with Him while we continuously sin. This is to say that as we grow in maturity and as

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<sup>5</sup> See Mark 10:45

we struggle with sin and as we remain weak and as we fail to walk in complete obedience we can be sure that Jesus is beckoning us to Him not sending us away from Him. The only reason we have to depart from Jesus is if we refuse to let Him serve us. Refusing Jesus the right to serve us looks like resisting the cleansing and sanctifying work of the cross. It looks like resisting the grace of God that is ours in abundance by virtue of the substitutionary death of Jesus.

Most of us live our lives resisting Jesus because of our immaturity believing that true humility is refusing to come near to Him in our sin. And because we don't know the cross we remain in this low estate hoping to magically become mature so that we can bring pleasure to His heart. The problem with waiting around for that to happen is that it never will. It's imperative that our pursuit of communion with God is deeply rooted and firmly established in the effectual work of the cross and in Jesus' pursuit of us. Let us always remember: We love Him because He first loved us.<sup>6</sup> How tragic it is to live as though we are the pursuers of God. We are not. We are the beloved. We are they whom Jesus came to wash and cleanse with His efficacious blood that alone brings atonement.<sup>7</sup>

In the next section we'll look at Jesus' conversation with Peter more in depth fixing our attention on the sufficiency of the cross and of Jesus' shed blood.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 9:22