

# Jesus is the Humble Servant

## John 13:1-17

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### Introduction:

1. Jesus as a humble servant conjures up many passages of Scripture in the mind of an earnest Bible student.
  - a. The humble servitude of the Master brings to mind the picturesque portrait of Isaiah 53 in which the Messiah is envisioned as a lamb being led to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearer is silent.
  - b. The gospel records record the Messianic King coming into Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, not as a victorious king riding on a prancing battle horse but as a humble servant riding on the colt of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5; John 12:15).
  - c. Paul describes Jesus as a person who "...made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men <sup>8</sup> And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).
2. In our text of John 13:1-17, Jesus is described as a servant who humbly washes the feet of His disciples.
  - a. As we learn in Luke 22, while Jesus was in the upper room preparing His disciples for His death and warning the betrayer, there was a contention among the disciples as to which of them should be accounted the greatest (verse 24).
  - b. It is on this occasion, Jesus provides them an example of the greatest citizen of the Messianic kingdom.
  - c. Keep in mind, this incident takes place the evening before Jesus is crucified.
3. Before we can fully grasp the situation, we must understand the terms "Master" and "Lord" which Jesus said the disciples called Him: (John 13:13-14).
  - a. The term "Master" means teacher and is used of the relationship between a disciple and his teacher.
  - b. The term "Lord" indicates authority, ownership, and respect.
  - c. Keep these terms in mind as we study this passage.
4. There are numerous descriptions of Jesus as a humble servant.
5. In our text, consider these five.

### Discussion:

- I. **THE LOVE OF THE LORD.** John 13:1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.
  - A. John first describes the occasion:
    1. It was just before the Passover meal was to be eaten.
    2. The time of His death was in the near future in which He would depart out of this world.
  - B. Though He knew His death and His departure was imminent, yet Jesus' love for His disciples persisted.
  - C. Enough could not be said of the humble Servant's love.
    1. The humble servant knew of the various departures and denials that would take place on the very next day, and yet, the text says, "He loved them unto the end."

2. Even though all of His disciples said they would not forsake Him, yet all did, but the humble Servant loved them unto the end.
3. Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

**II. BETRAYAL OF THE LORD.** John 13:2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

- A. There is a textual variance here.
  1. The American Standard Version says "during supper..."
  2. The textual variance actually concerns a single letter: "ε" or "ι" which changes the meaning from past tense to present tense.
  3. Because of context, the meaning of the phrase is probably after the supper was served but during the meal.
- B. As to "the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot," there are several factors to consider.
  1. Because all men are given a choice, then we can be sure that Judas had a choice in this matter.
  2. If Judas did not have a choice, then it is an accusation against God because He would be a respecter of persons by not allowing Judas to choose.
  3. Judas did not always allow Satan to influence him.
    - a. Judas was in charge of the money box, and Jesus was not a fool and would not have given Judas this responsibility if he was dishonest at the beginning.
    - b. Judas was called like the other disciples and given the same charge which Jesus would not have done if Judas was dishonest from the beginning.
  4. Judas was given a choice, and he chose poorly by allowing Satan and covetousness into his heart.
  5. Judas was not part of some form of Calvinistic predestination, but had a change of heart, gave into temptation, and sinned by betraying Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
- C. Because of foreknowledge, Jesus knew Judas would betray Him.
  1. Jesus even identified him (Matthew 26:25; John 13:26).
  2. However, Judas was deceived by the deceitfulness of sin and had already seared his heart with a hot iron.
  3. Thus, rather than repenting, he would later leave the upper room and do his deceitful deed.

**III. HUMILITY OF THE LORD.** John 13:3-5 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; <sup>4</sup>He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. <sup>5</sup>After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

- A. Verse 3 assures us that Jesus understood His divine nature.
  1. Jesus knew His sovereign authority – "The Father had given all things into His hands."
  2. Jesus knew He was come from God – He is "the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14).
  3. Jesus knew He was about to return to God – On the cross, He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).
- B. With those thoughts in mind, notice what Jesus does.
  1. "He riseth from supper and laid aside his garments" – in other words, He lays aside His long, loose, outer garments which was customary to lay aside when working.

2. This leaves the inner tunic, but Jesus, the Master and Lord, then takes a towel (a linen cloth) and girds up the inner tunic.
3. Then the Savior of mankind like a lowly servant pours water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet.

C. Here is the situation:

1. Since people wore sandals, and roads were dusty and dirty, it was customary for a servants to wash the feet of guests as they would arrive.
2. Since there was no host in the upper room and since none of the disciples volunteered to do this, Jesus took the occasion to teach a tremendous object lesson.
3. Peter probably had this situation in mind when he wrote, 1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed [girded - ASV] with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

**IV. DISCUSSION WITH THE LORD.** John 13:6-11 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? <sup>7</sup>Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. <sup>8</sup>Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. <sup>9</sup>Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. <sup>10</sup>Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. <sup>11</sup>For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

- A. Apparently, Jesus had washed some of the disciples' feet before coming to Peter.
  1. When Jesus came to Peter, Peter refused to allow Jesus to do such a lowly task to him.
  2. Peter address Jesus correctly, "Lord" which indicates why he refused to let Him wash his feet.
  3. Apparently, Peter was embarrassed about the Lord washing the disciples' feet.
- B. Jesus mildly rebukes Peter by saying, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."
  1. What Peter did not understand at this point was the nature of the Messianic kingdom.
  2. Peter, like the other disciples, was still thinking in terms of a physical/material world domination/kingdom.
  3. He did not understand because he could not see afar off (2 Peter 1:9), that is, he had not grown to spiritual maturity.
  4. The object lesson was not just about washing feet.
  5. Disciples of Jesus must overcome pride and worldly ambitions to be great in the kingdom and replaced them with humility and servitude.
- C. Peter's response is emphatic — "Thou shalt never wash my feet."
- D. But the One to whom Peter called "Lord" said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."
  1. In other words, Jesus is saying, Peter, if you refuse, then you will not have part in My work."
  2. Submission to the Lord's will is the most basic requirement of discipleship.
- E. Peter must have understood what Jesus said, because now Peter requests Jesus to wash not only his feet but also his hands and head.
  1. Peter had a change of heart but still did not understand!
  2. If submission to the will of the Lord meant having the Lord wash your feet, then why not wash my hands and head too.
  3. Though Peter repented, he failed to see the lesson.
  4. Peter is like so many today, the lesson is not washing feet or doing menial tasks.
  5. The lesson is humble submission to the will of God!

- F. In response, Jesus said, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.”
  - 1. Because of the last statement concerning Judas Iscariot, we can be sure there is a deeper spiritual meaning to this statement.
  - 2. On the surface, Jesus is telling Peter he does not need his hands and head washed because he has already bathed, and because of the journey, he needs only to wash his feet.
  - 3. The deeper meaning is Peter is spiritually clean which cannot be said of all the disciples.
- G. John 13:11 “For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.”
  - 1. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, was not clean.
  - 2. Physically, who knows whether or not Jesus had washed his feet.
  - 3. In either case, Judas was not clean because he had allowed temptation to conceive and give birth to sin.

**V. LESSONS FROM THE LORD.** John 13:12-17 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup>Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. <sup>14</sup>If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup>Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. <sup>17</sup>If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

- A. Jesus' Question: “Know ye what I have done to you?”
  - 1. They understood Jesus washed their feet, and they understood that was not the question Jesus asked.
  - 2. The question concerned the significance of the deed.
  - 3. They witnessed the action but needed to learn the meaning behind the action.
- B. Jesus' Explanation: the one you address as your Lord and Master has washed your feet.
  - 1. Jesus reminded them of His rightful position of authority.
  - 2. Remember, “Lord” carries the idea of authority, and “Master” means teacher which indicates they are His disciples.
  - 3. So He is saying, the person you say you serve has served you.
- C. Jesus' Application: “Ye also ought to wash one another's feet.”
  - 1. They ought not be so proud and vain as to look for ways to be served.
  - 2. Followers of Christ ought to look for ways to serve.
  - 3. Looking to be served shows selfishness, pride, and arrogance while looking for ways to serve shows selflessness, humility, and submission.
- D. Jesus' Example: “For I have given you an example.”
  - 1. An example is a pattern to follow, and thus, Jesus said, “that ye should do as I have done to you.”
  - 2. What is the example?
    - a. If all a person sees is foot washing, he or she has missed the point.
    - b. The example is not foot washing!
    - c. The example is humility and servitude.
  - 3. Listen to Jesus' explanation of His example.
    - a. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.”
    - b. In other words, servants ought to be willing to do whatever their Lord has done.
    - c. Since the Lord and Master offered such menial service, then His disciples ought to be willing to do the same.
- E. Jesus' Blessing: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”
  - 1. This is actually an affirmation — “since you know these things...”

2. The blessings does not come from the knowledge, but only when knowledge is applied and lived out in life will happiness evolve.
3. Generally speaking we think being served will bring happiness, but the Lord taught servitude and humility brings with it genuine happiness.

**Conclusion:**

1. As a member of the Lord's church and as a disciple of Jesus, what are you looking for?
  - a. Are you looking to be served? (Are you looking for a church to meet your needs?)
  - b. Or are you looking to serve?
2. Too many in the religious world are looking to be served, and they are ever looking, never satisfied.
  - a. They go from church to church.
  - b. When one church does not satisfy, they move on.
  - c. Or when they find another church which can better serve them, they quickly hightail it over to them.
3. However, true New Testament Christianity is not about being served, it's about service.
4. Jesus has given us an example — not necessarily of foot washing, but of humility and servitude.
5. Let us, therefore, follow our Lord's example.