John: sermon #14

Lessons from the Upper Room

(John 13)

Introduction

John 13 is set during Holy Week in the Upper Room in Jerusalem where Jesus meets with his disciples and begins his "farewell message" which continues through chapter 17. In chapter 13 Jesus addresses four progressive topics from the perspective of four relationships. There is much here to learn and to live from Jesus. Let us come together and listen to Jesus with open ears, open hearts and willing hands.

1. Humility: Jesus and the Father (13:1–5)

***1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time
had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.
Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed
them the full extent of his love. 2 The evening meal was being
served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son
of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put
all things under his power, and that he had come from God and
was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his
outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 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.***

Jesus had entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, on the following day Jesus cleansed the temple. The day following the temple cleansing was Jesus' final public conflict with the religious leaders as they sought to trip him up and get evidence to arrest him. Now we come to the Upper Room setting where Jesus met with his disciples for a Passover meal and a time of intimate fellowship and important instruction. The end is now merely hours away. Indeed, Jesus is quite aware that "the time had come." John emphasized the fact that Jesus lived on a "heavenly

timetable" as he went about doing the Father's will. Note the development of this theme:

2:4—"My time has not yet come."
7:30—"…his time had not yet come."
8:20—"…his time had not yet come."
12:23—"The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified."
13:1—"Jesus knew that his time had come."
17:1—"Father, the time has come."

What was this divinely appointed "time"? It was the time when he would be glorified through his death, resurrection, and ascension. From the human point of view, it meant suffering; but from the divine point of view, it meant glory. He would soon leave this world and return to the Father who sent him, having loved his own and having finished his work on earth (17:4). No one could arrest Jesus, let alone kill him, until the right time had arrived.

Jesus seems well aware of what was about to happen. For example, he knew that Judas would betray him. Judas is mentioned eight times in John's Gospel, more than in any of the other Gospels. Satan had entered into Judas (Luke 22:3), and now he would give him the necessary thought to bring about the arrest and crucifixion of the Son of God.

Jesus also knew that the Father had given him all things (John 13:3). This statement parallels John 3:35, and reminds us of Matthew 11:27. Even in his humiliation, our Lord had all things through his Father. **Because Jesus knew who he was, where he came from, what he had, and where he was going, he was complete master of the situation. Through our union with Christ we can have the same assurance and freedom to fulfill the Father's will, when we know that Jesus is the master of our situations.**

What Jesus knew helped determine what Jesus did (John 13:4–5). The disciples must have been shocked when they saw their Master rise from supper, lay aside his outer garments, wrap a towel around his waist, take a basin of water, and wash their feet. **This was a menial task, done by the servants of the house, and yet here was Jesus going from one person to the next, washing their feet.**

The background to this foot washing is found in Luke 22-24-30 where Jesus is addressing the competitive spirit in the hearts of his disciples who seemed to be fond of disputing over which of them was the greatest. This self-centered attitude was quite the opposite of the spirit of Jesus which is one of self-less service. And so to teach them that lesson, Jesus gives them an unforgettable object-lesson in humility which rebukes their selfishness and pride.

Think about this: The Father had put all things into the Son's hands, *yet Jesus, the Son of God, picks up a towel and a basin!* His humility was not born of poverty, but of riches. He was rich, yet became poor voluntarily for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9). John revels in this humility of our Lord even while magnifying his deity: "The Son can do nothing by himself" (John 5:19, 30). "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (6:38). "My teaching is not my own" (7:16). "I am not seeking glory for myself" (8:50). "These words you hear are not my own" (14:24).

J**esus was Sovereign God, yet he took the place of a servant. He had all things in his hands, yet he picked up a towel. He was Lord and Master, yet he served his followers. True humility grows out of our union with Christ who is the truly humble one. In that union we share Jesus' life which is in continual relationship with the Father to do the Father's will so that the Father's name may be glorified.**

2. Service: Jesus and Peter (13:6–11)

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

As Peter watched the Lord wash his friends' feet, he became more and more disturbed and could not understand what Jesus was doing. The word here translated "wash" (13:5–6, 8, 10, 12, and 14) is *nipto* and means "to wash a part of the body." Jesus contrasts this in verse 10 with one who has been bathed all over. The distinction is important.

Jesus says to them, "unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (13:8). The Greek word translated "part" is *meros*, and it carries the meaning here of "participation, having a share in someone or something." God "bathes us all over" in salvation by baptizing us into Christ—by bringing us into *union* with Christ; and that is a settled relationship that cannot change (the verb *had a bath* in 13:10 is in the perfect tense—it speaks to something that is accomplished once and for all time). However, our ongoing participation with or *communion* with Christ depends on our ongoing fellowship with him, and that fellowship involves Jesus' continuously cleansing (washing) us. We participate in that washing as we confess our sins and our continual need for him (1 John 1:9). Sin hinders our walk with the Lord; and through confession we participate in Jesus' ongoing washing of our 'feet' (lives).

This basic truth of our life and ministry with Christ is beautifully illustrated in the Old Testament priesthood. When the priest was consecrated, he was bathed all over (Ex. 29:4), and that experience was never repeated. However, during his daily ministry, he became defiled; so it was necessary that he wash his hands and feet at the brass laver in the courtyard (Ex. 30:18–21). Only then could he enter the holy place and trim the lamps, eat the holy bread, or burn the incense.

The Lord has cleansed us at the cross and extends that finished work to us through the revelation of his word (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25–26). The "water of the Word" keeps our hearts and minds clean so that we will avoid the pollutions of this world. But when we sin, we have a loving Advocate in glory who hears our confession, extends the forgiveness that is ours and cleanses us (1 John 2:1–2).

Peter did not understand what his Lord was doing; but instead of waiting for an explanation, he impulsively tried to tell the Lord what to do. There is a strong double negative in 13:8: "You shall by no means wash my feet, no, never" (WUEST). Peter really meant it! Then when he discovered that to refuse the Lord would mean to lose the Lord's fellowship, he went in the opposite direction and asked for a complete bath!

We can learn an important lesson from Peter: don't question the Lord's will or work, and don't try to change it. He knows what He is doing. Peter had a difficult time accepting Christ's ministry to him *because Peter was not yet ready to minister to the other disciples*. It takes humility and grace to serve others, but it also takes humility and grace to allow others to serve us. The beautiful thing about a submissive spirit is that it can both give and receive to the glory of God.

John was careful to point out that Peter and Judas were in a different relationship with Jesus. Yes, Jesus washed Judas' feet! But it did Judas no good because he had not been bathed all over.

It is a wonderful thing to deepen our fellowship with the Lord and our participation in his ministry. We need to allow him to continually wash our feet so that we may wash the feet of others with him.

3. Happiness: Jesus and the Disciples (13:12–17)

12 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 asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Jesus next addresses a third topic by giving a beatitude: "Now that you know these things [the importance of humility and service], you will be blessed ['happy' KJV] if you do them" (13:17). It's not enough to hear, understand and approve of humility and service, one must follow through in action and that will bring a blessing (happiness) to the doer. True happiness is a life lived out of our union with Christ—a life joined to Christ as he does his Father's will through the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. This is the life of humbly serving others—a life set apart (made holy) for God and by God as a steward of his grace in the world.

In 13:12 Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what he had done for them by washing their feet. Because he knew that they didn't he explained what he had done and why: he had given them an object lesson in humble service, an example of the spirit and approach they were to follow in their ministries and lives. The world thinks of happiness as the result of others serving us, but real joy comes when we serve others in the name of Christ.

Now because Jesus was their Master, he had every right to command their service. But instead, he served them! He gave them an example of true Christian ministry. On more than one occasion during the previous three years, he had taught them lessons about humility and service; but now he had demonstrated the lesson to them. Perhaps the disciples remembered his lesson about the child (Matt. 18:1–6), or the rebuke he gave James and John when they asked for thrones (Matt. 20:20–28). Now it was all starting to fall into place.

The servant (slave) is not greater than his master; so, if the master becomes a slave, where does that put the slave? Didn't Jesus already tell them in so many words that *The slave must become servant of all!* By becoming a servant our Lord set us an example that does not push us down: but rather lifts us up! He dignified sacrifice and service. This was unusual in a culture where Romans had no use for humility, and the Greeks despised manual labor. Jesus combined these two when he washed the disciples' feet.

However, it is not enough just to *know* this truth; we must put it into practice. James 1:22–27 makes it clear that the blessing comes in the *doing* of the Word, not the hearing. Even studying this section in John's Gospel can stir us emotionally or enlighten us intellectually; but it cannot bless us spiritually until we do what Jesus told us to do. This is the only way to lasting blessedness.

4. Hypocrisy: Jesus and Judas (13:18–35)

18 "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' 19 I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. 20 I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." 21 After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." 22 His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. 23 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." 25 Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" 26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. 27 As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, 28 but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. 29 Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. 30 As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. 31 When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. 33 My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one

another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

A dark shadow now fell across the scene as Jesus dealt with Judas, the traitor. At this pivotal moment, his life now clearly hanging in the balance, Jesus had two great concerns: to fulfill the Word of God (13:18–30) by identifying his betrayer and to magnify the glory of God (13:31–35). Included in these concerns was his concern that Judas' treachery would not weaken the other disciples' faith. This is why he identifies him through the prophetic word of Scripture: when the disciples saw all of this fulfilled, it would make their faith stronger (8:28). Judas was disloyal, but Jesus expected the other disciples to be loyal to him.

Peter signaled to John, who was the closest to Jesus at the table, and asked him to find out who the traitor was. The Lord's reply to John was certainly not heard by all the men; in fact, they were carrying on discussions among themselves about who the traitor might be (Luke 22:23). When Jesus gave the bread to Judas, it was interpreted as an act of love and honor and our Lord's actions were seen in that light: He was bestowing a special honor on Judas. No wonder, after Judas left the room, the disciples got into an argument over who was the greatest (Luke 22:24–30).

John was no doubt stunned by this revelation, but before he could say or do anything, Jesus had sent Judas on his way. Even though Satan had entered Judas, it was Jesus who was in charge. He lived on the timetable given to him by the Father, and he wanted to fulfill what was written in the Word. Since Judas was the treasurer, it was logical for the disciples to conclude that he had been sent on a special mission by the Lord. Judas had hypocritically expressed an interest in the poor (12:4–6), so perhaps he was on an errand of mercy to help the poor.

Keep in mind that Judas knew exactly what he was doing and he did it deliberately. He had already met with the Jewish religious leaders and agreed to lead them to Jesus in such a way that there would not be any public disturbance (Luke 21:37–22:6). He heard Jesus say, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is

betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born!" (Matt. 26:24) Yet, he persisted in his unbelief and treachery.

John's little phrase "and it was night" carries a tremendous impact when you remember that *light* and *darkness* are important spiritual images in John's Gospel. Jesus is the Light of the world (8:12), but Judas rejected Jesus and went out into darkness; and for Judas, *it is still night!* Those who do evil hate the light (3:18–21).

The instant Judas was gone Jesus began to instruct his disciples and prepare them for his crucifixion and his return to heaven. It was after Judas' departure that he instituted the Lord's Supper (mentioned in the other gospels, but not by John). Judas was out in the night, controlled by the prince of darkness, Satan; but Jesus was in the light, sharing love and truth with his beloved disciples. What a contrast!

The theme now changes to the glory of God (13:31–35). From the human perspective, the death of Christ was a dastardly deed involving unspeakable suffering and humiliation; but from the divine perspective it was the revelation of the glory of God. "The hour is come for the Son of man to be glorified" (12:23). What did it mean for Jesus to glorify the Father? He tells us in his prayer: "I have brought you glory on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (17:4). God is glorified when we faithfully do what he calls us to do. In our Lord's case, the Father's will was that the Son die for the lost, be raised from the dead, and ascend to heaven. Through all this the Son glorified the Father and the Father glorified the Son (17:1, 5).

There would come a time when the Son would be glorified in these disciples (17:10), but they could not follow him at that time. Peter boasted that he would follow the Lord even to death (Luke 22:33), but unfortunately ended up denying him three times. Jesus had said to the Jews on two occasions that they would seek him but not be able to find him or follow him (7:33–36; 8:21–24). Note that he did not tell his disciples that they would not be able to find him, but he did say that to the unbelieving Jews. **One day the believing disciples would go to be with him (14:1–3), and they would also see him after his resurrection. But**

during this time of his suffering and death, it was important that they not try to follow him.

The disciples' responsibility was to love one another just as Christ had loved them. They would certainly need this love in the hours to follow, when their Master would be taken from them and their brave spokesman, Peter, would fail him and them. In fact, all of them would fail, and the only thing that would bring them together would be their love for Christ and for each other. The word *love* is used only twelve times in John 1–12, but in John 13–21 it is used forty-four times! It is a key word in Christ's farewell sermon to his disciples, as well as a burden in his High Priestly Prayer (17:26). The word *new* does not mean "new in time," because love has been important to God's people even from Old Testament times (see Lev. 19:18). It means "new in experience, fresh." It is the opposite of "worn out." Love would take on a new meaning and power because of the death of Christ on the cross (15:13). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, love would have a new power in their lives.

Conclusion

This section begins and ends with love: Jesus' love for his own (13:1) and their love for one another. It is love that is the true evidence that we belong to Jesus Christ. The church leader Tertullian quoted pagans as saying of Christians, "See how they love one another?" And how do we evidence that love? By doing what Jesus did: laying down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). And the way we do that is through a heart of humility, and self sacrifice, taking the lower place, and serving. This leads us to experience the love and the heart of Jesus—which is true happiness. As was said above, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, love would have a new power in their lives. Now they would live in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of power, and of love and of a sound, self disciplined mind.

This issue continues a series in the gospel of John with material from *The Bible Expository Commentary* by Warren Wiersbe, *The New Bible Commentary, The Parable of Joy* by Michael Card, and *The Gospel of John* by F.F. Bruce.
Note: Bold script above covered in Worship Services.