

The Table and the Towel

John 13:1-17

This morning we begin the Upper Room discourse, which contains some of the most intimate and personal teaching of our Lord. Much of what John records for us in chapters 13-18 is not found in the other three gospels. Just a reminder, John the Beloved is our author! He was seated next to Jesus in the Upper Room (John 21:20). Few people knew the heart of Jesus as John did.

- **Jesus sought privacy with His own. “Now before the feast of the Passover” (Matt. 26:17-19 & Mark 14:12-16)**

This gives us a time reference. Jesus is about to share a Passover meal with His disciples. The Passover was one of the most holy days observed in Judaism. It was a perpetual reminder of God’s redeeming love and grace. Jesus was about to demonstrate the true spiritual meaning of the Passover by transforming it into the Lord’s Supper.

“Jesus knew that His hour had come.” Jesus lived His life in anticipation of this hour.

“That He should depart this world to the Father.” Jesus was not uncertain about where He was going; He was going to the Father! Jesus would only depart this world by way of the cross.

“He loved them to the end.” Jesus had loved His own. But He hadn’t finished loving them. He would love them to the end. The idea behind the phrase “to the end” is *to the fullest extent, to the uttermost*.

- **Jesus showed the disciples true humility. (13:2-5)** Jesus, the Lord and Master, washes the disciples’ feet, while all the time one of them is making plans to betray Him. These two stark realities are intertwined in the passage.

Verse 3 is of great comfort! Jesus is about to face the agony of crucifixion and the terror of standing in the place of guilty sinners before the righteous wrath of God the Father. At the same time, Jesus went into this situation as a victor, not as a victim. He knew His Father had a divine plan!

At this moment of deep meaning, Jesus did something that must have seemed strange. He began to do the job of the lowest servant in the household. He began to wash the disciples’ feet.

“He disrobed himself, though angels longed to cast the imperial purple about his shoulders. With all things in his hand, he yet took a towel and wiped the disciples’ feet.” (Spurgeon)

So why didn’t any of the disciples do this first? Any of the disciples would have gladly washed Jesus’ feet. But they could not wash His without having to be available to wash the others’ feet. So, no one’s feet got washed!

- **Jesus symbolically revealed the need for Spiritual cleansing. (13:6-9)** Peter recognized the impropriety of the Lord washing his feet and thus protested the whole deal. But as is often the case, Peter speaks when he should remain silent. In the end he changes from, “you will not wash my feet” to “Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and my head.” Give me a whole bath!

This foot washing is a powerful lesson in humility. But it is more than that. The deeper meaning here is that Jesus has no fellowship with those who have not been cleansed by Him. And even those cleansed by Him through regeneration of the Spirit, need daily washing as well.

- **Jesus explains the significance of what He did. (13:12-17)** Jesus reminds the disciples of their teacher/disciple relationship. If the greater is willing to serve the lesser; should not the lesser willingly serve as well?

“If there is a position in the church where the worker will have to toil hard and get no thanks for it, take it, and be pleased with it. If you can perform a service, which few will ever seek to do themselves, or appreciate when performed by others, yet occupy it with holy delight. Covet humble work, and when you get it be content to continue in it. There is no great rush after the lowest places, you will rob no one by seeking them.”
(Spurgeon)

Be willing to serve in the lowest of places, for God Himself girded the towel!

Application: We should seek private, intimate moments with the Lord!

Daily cleansing is part of our continual sanctification; this is a dirty world!

We should always remember humility trumps pride, every time!