

**Find Life in the Son:
Servant Lord
John 13:1-17**

Introduction

Many days of our lives are like looking out over flyover country from an airline window. But some experiences are so lifechanging, we never forget what it was like to live through them. Chapters 13-17 record the hours in the upper room with Jesus as He taught and prayed for His disciples before heading to Gethsemane. There He would be arrested and hauled away for an illegal nighttime trial on the eve of His crucifixion. John was there. He never forgot how it felt to experience these events that happened when he was a young disciple of Jesus. As he writes he draws us into the intense and momentous hours just before Jesus is tried and crucified.

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then

he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

1. Steadfast Love (1-2)

2. Humble Service (3-5)
3. Necessary Cleansing (6-11)
4. Blessed Example (12-17)

1. Steadfast Love (1)

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him,

The Feast of Passover commemorated the deliverance and exodus of Israel after years of slavery in Egypt. Despite determined refusal to let God's people go, Pharaoh's hardened heart gave way when God sent the tenth plague on Egypt. Pharaoh finally let Israel go. The death angel passed over the land, destroying all the firstborn. Each Israelite family who sacrificed an unblemished lamb and spread its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their house were spared the devastating plague of death. They were passed over without harm. They were spared from the death angel of the Lord and freed from the tyranny of Egypt. It all became an apt symbol of the redemption Jesus the Messiah would fulfill. John the Baptist first introduced Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He brings a deliverance far greater than rescue from

Egypt. Rescue from sin, Satan, death, and the wrath of God. But like the first Passover, this rescue requires sacrifice. An innocent life given for the guilty.

So Jesus will celebrate the Passover with His disciples. But He will also fulfill its meaning. That's why Paul calls Jesus "Christ, our Passover lamb" in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

Jesus knows His hour has come. Time to die for our sins, time to depart and go to the Father. His mission is nearing its completion in keeping with God's saving purposes.

He had loved His own throughout His earthly ministry. Think of all their faults and failings, their blind spots, their petty jealousies, their faltering faith. He loved them nonetheless. We all fall short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, not even one. God showed His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We don't have to earn His love. We can't. He gives it freely.

And He did not stop loving them as He entered the crucible of great suffering, mocking, torture, and death for their sake. There is no greater love than that of a man who lays down his life for his friends. That the perfect God-man would love us as friends, though we are rebel enemies by nature, and would die to break sin's tyranny over us in

order to restore us to fellowship with God, is astounding. Amazing grace.

As Lord of the universe, and knowing all He was about to undergo for our sake, His steadfast love for His own was unshakable. Remember that, whenever you enter a time of great crisis. This was a devastatingly dark time for the disciples. There was much they did not understand. They will be overcome with fear, disappointment, perplexity as they go through the next few hours and days. But through it all Jesus would not stop loving them. In fact, the darkness He was leading them through was for their sake. It was necessary. It was lifegiving. It would pay off forever.

This steadfast love for His people is not confined to the apostles who accompanied Him on earth. Steadfast love characterizes who God Himself is. The Psalms—exultations of praise to God—repeatedly rejoice in God's steadfast love. It never quits. It's rooted in covenant relationship. It shows itself in kind deeds. It is the great comfort of God's people, whatever troubles they encounter in this sin-cursed world.

In stark contrast to the steadfast, faithful love of Jesus stands the betrayal of Judas. Jesus already knew about that too. He's known it all along. No heart is hidden from His view.

Nothing is taking Him by surprise. He is willingly laying down His life for His sheep. And He knows completely who His sheep are.

Applications

- If you are trusting in Jesus, when are you tempted to think His steadfast love toward you has somehow ended?
- How does it help you in the daily grind of life as well as in the crises, to hold onto the reality of the Lord's steadfast love for you?
- How can you leverage whatever betrayals you've experienced to increase your gratitude for God's ever-loyal love toward His own?

2. Humble Service (3-5)

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

Knowing—

Father had given all things into his hands
He had come from God
He was going back to God

Laid aside His outer garments, took a towel and a basin of water, and washed His disciples' feet. This was not just some eye-catching ritual. It was simply a job that needed to be done. Walking the dusty streets of Jerusalem in sandals rendered one's feet exceptionally dirty.

Normally the lowest of household slaves would do this task as guests came into a home, but evidently there was no such slave there that night, so the customary and necessary task was left undone. None of the disciples rose to take care of it. Jesus did. He knows full well God the Father has given all things into His hands. He is eternal, having come from God and was about to return to God. *He is the highest-ranking Person in the room. He is the highest-ranking Person on the planet. But He takes on the role of slave for the sake of those He loves.*

Philippians 2:5-8

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Washing feet may seem demeaning, but it was a small sacrifice compared to the humbling Jesus was about to undergo—death on the cross, bearing the sins of the world. It was small compared to the giant step-down God the Son took to become a human being and pitch His tent alongside of ours. It is just as He has said: He is gentle and lowly of heart. Despite the reality that He is King of the universe.

Applications

- Why is willing, humble service inseparable from the gospel of Christ?
- What lessons do you draw from the fact that the humblest Person in the room was also the greatest?
- How do the actions of Jesus overturn the way the world thinks of greatness?

3. Necessary Cleansing (6-11)

⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

Peter is appalled that his Lord would do such a menial task as wash Peter's dirty feet. It was a job for the lowest of slaves, but the

greatest among them humbled Himself to do it. Peter was sincere, but wrong in his response. He did not understand what Jesus was doing or why.

John 13:7

Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

How often this is our experience, even as followers of Christ! We are grateful for what we do understand. We are no longer blind slaves of the darkness. But there is much along the path of following Jesus that we do not understand now.

"Even at our best . . . we shall find that many of Christ's dealings with us are hard to understand in this life. The 'why' . . . of many a providence will often puzzle and perplex us quite as much as the washing puzzled Peter. . . . Even so there will be a day when every dark page in our life's history will be explained, and when, as we stand with Christ in glory, we shall know all." Ryle, 13

Jesus moves the spiritual connection of what He is doing. "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me."

He washed the feet of everyone there, but not all were clean (Judas), so clearly Jesus is not

talking about outward physical cleansing but the heart reality of spiritual cleansing.

In our human nature we strive to make it on our own without outside help, even from God. There has to come a point when we realize that being spiritually clean from our sin plague is utterly beyond our grasp to achieve. We have to humble ourselves to let Christ wash us clean.

The world's way is either to minimize the sinfulness of our sin or to exaggerate our ability to clean up ourselves. Either way leaves us unclean. Jesus must wash you or you do not belong to Him. Even among the twelve was one who remained spiritually unwashed.

*"Are you washed in the blood,
In the soul-cleansing blood of the Lamb?"*

Despite his flaws and blind spots, Peter wants more than anything to belong to Jesus. So he lurches to the other extreme.

John 13:9-11

⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew

who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Once cleansed from sin, a believer need only be cleansed of the daily defilement that comes from walking through this world. Do not think that because there was a day you turned from your sin to trust in Jesus the Savior from sin that you no longer need to live in repentance. Your turning from sin was not a one-time event, but the beginning of a repentant way of life. In this life we are surrounded with temptations, marked by sinful words, trends, and people, and we are subject to our own weaknesses. We are called to do daily battle against sin. The power of the indwelling Spirit of God enables us to do so (Romans 8). It is what marks us as truly belonging to Jesus. *Don't think that because you were right with God last week, everything is okay today. Be honest about what's really going on. Keep short accounts with God. Confess your sins whenever the Spirit convicts you.* Let Him wash your feet. His sanctifying of our lives is an ongoing process.

Nothing can substitute for being spiritually cleansed by Jesus. Judas was part of the group, preached, did miracles, entrusted with the money, but had never been cleansed. We know that his heart was still given over to greed. And one dominant sin usually brings a nest of snakes with it. In the case of Judas,

his greed brought with it hypocrisy, betrayal, and joining in the conspiracy to murder Jesus.

If Jesus does not wash you from your sin filth, you don't belong to Him. It does not matter how many church services you attend, how many hymns you sing, whether they be high church or folk tunes, how many Bible verses you can quote, how many doctrines you can articulate, how many of your friends and family are truly born-again Christians. Are you washed? To belong to Jesus you must be washed from your sin.

Applications

- When did you first experience the cleansing Jesus gives to those who trust fully in Him, and what was that like?
- What are ways you stay alert to the defilement you pick up living in this world, and what do you do when you realize it's there?
- Why do you think Judas was able to fool the other disciples for so long, and why was Jesus never fooled by Judas' hypocrisy?
- What sin(s) and spiritual dirt do you need to have Jesus wash clean through your confession and repentance today?

4. Blessed Example (12-17)

¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he

said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Blessed—the NT equivalent of the OT word "blessed" we find in Psalm 1. It speaks of true happiness rooted in a relationship of loyal love with God Himself.

Note that it's not merely that you know these things. It's knowing them AND doing them. Our passage starts with talking about what Jesus knew. It displays what Jesus did. He calls us not just to know, but to do.

Christianity is not merely an intellectual pursuit. It flows out into daily life even in its most mundane tasks—like washing dirty feet.

Jesus was indeed the disciples' Teacher and Lord, yet He voluntarily did the job of a slave to meet the need they had. All of them could surely have seen how dirty everyone's feet was. All of them lived in a culture where it was customary for a slave to take care of that

problem first thing upon entering the house. But none of them did it. Instead, we know from Luke 22 that right in the middle of Jesus' instituting the Lord's supper symbolic of His self-sacrificial death for our sins, they were arguing about who would be greatest in His kingdom.

If you think serving Jesus is about position, power, respectability, you don't understand ministry. You don't understand Christianity. You don't understand Jesus. Paul tells Timothy that to desire the office of an overseer is a good thing. But many think that the role of a pastor-elder-overseer is something like climbing the corporate ladder, that it's about getting to tell people what to do, that it's about people thinking highly of you. If that's your view and you enter into the role of an undershepherd, you're in for a major correction. Get busy doing the menial tasks, and don't stop doing them no matter what your role in the body may be. Lead by example.

This principle applies to anything and everything we do as believers. If you're currently a student, you've got to have a higher goal than just making good grades and finding a lucrative career.

If you're a parent, your goal can't be merely for your children to make you look good.

Good parenting requires a lot of self-sacrifice. It's ten thousand mundane, lowly tasks for the sake of discipling the next generation to follow Jesus. That means wiping runny noses, and losing sleep to care for sick ones. It's taking valuable time to listen well to your teenager process new hurdles and discoveries. It's modeling what serving Jesus looks like with humble love displayed your private life.

You may be a child or teenager in your home. If you belong to Jesus are you being faithful to serve in the mundane jobs and chores? Fine to dream about some great thing you'll do someday. But what are you doing to help with the needs around you now? If you're unwilling to make the small sacrifices, what makes you think you'll make the great sacrifices?

If you run a business for only financial success or public recognition, you may gain those objectives, but you will lose the greater eternal rewards of using your life to express love for God and practical love for others.

What about the small inconveniences—like welcoming a guest and helping someone find a seat? Is your response like that of Jesus?

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men, for we serve

the Lord Christ. Following Jesus is about dying to self and taking up a cross. It's about noticing the dirty feet and stooping down to wash them. The more people you lead, the more people you serve.

We are to outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12), but if you hunger for recognition and praise, you'll never be satisfied and you'll be easily led astray by flattery. If you require affirmation and credit in exchange for your service, you're going to be frustrated and disillusioned. But serve Jesus, however mundane and unnoticed, and even a cup of cold water given in His name will one day receive His reward.

Philippians 2:1-5

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy,
² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus

True devotion to Christ makes us glad to do the most menial of tasks in service to our

brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as to those who have not yet trusted in Jesus. Serving in humble, ordinary ways does not reduce our status with God, but rather expresses the character of God in His love displayed for us. The servant is not greater than his Lord. "The greatest among you shall be the servant of all."

Applications

- Jesus declares that we will be blessed (happy) to live in humble service to others. In what ways does this truth frequently manifest itself despite how opposite it is to worldly wisdom?
- What mundane tasks can you take on to meet real needs among the people you know?
- What humble jobs do you shrink from, and why do you think you do?
- If Jesus had refused to do what was lowly and costly, where would we all be?
- If you refuse to do what is lowly and costly, what impact will your refusal have on others and on your testimony for the gospel of Christ?

Conclusion

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Applications Summary

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