

JOHN 13

JESUS, THE HUMBLE SERVANT

As we begin the 13th chapter of John, we enter “the holy place” in the sacred structure of this Gospel. In this and the next four successive chapters, we find ourselves alone with our Lord and His disciples.

It is the night upon which Jesus is betrayed. His public ministry has ended. The very next day will witness His anguish and death. He withdraws with the twelve to an upper room to eat the Passover-feast with them, to institute His own memorial supper, to reveal His matchless love for His followers, and to prepare them for the separation which He knows to be near. The majority of this narrative is occupied with words of comfort and farewell. These, however, are preceded by two significant acts, which are necessary preliminaries to the discourses which are about to be delivered; for they consist in the moral preparation of heart that is produced by the washing of the disciples’ feet, and in the dismissal of the traitor Judas from their midst.

On the way to the room which had been prepared for the Passover-supper, or as the disciples were seating themselves at the table, a dispute had arisen among them as to which of them was the greatest. Jesus takes the occasion (verses 1-20) to remind them of the fact that among His followers, greatness is measured by service; and then He gives them a memorable object lesson. The very act of washing His disciples’ feet was a picture of His voluntary humiliation in laying aside His heavenly glory, assuming the garment of human flesh, taking the place of a servant, and even stooping to the death of the cross, so that He might cleanse His followers from sin. The motive of our Lord in this striking act was perfect and unfailing love. Not one of the disciples – disputing, as they were, concerning their relative greatness – dared to humble himself so low as to perform this service for his brethren. Jesus, therefore, washed His disciples’ feet; but He did more than that, for He also cleansed their hearts! As they beheld His matchless humility, and as He touched their feet – all their envy, bitterness, unkindness, and wrath were gone. Then they were ready to listen to the marvelous discourses which fell from His lips. Jesus makes it clear to His disciples that they should imitate Him in loving and lowly service; and they must not only aim to secure the physical comfort of others, but also their moral and spiritual cleansing. “For I have given you an example,” says He, “that ye also should do as I have done to you.”

Before Jesus could feel free to pour out before the disciples the full measure of His final message of mystery, love, and cheer, He had to remove the one

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Jesus washes His disciples’ feet – verses 1-17
- ❖ He foretells the treachery of Judas – verses 18-30
- ❖ He exhorts His disciples to love one another – verses 31-35
- ❖ He foretells the denial of Peter – verses 36-38

unfaithful follower from their midst. He plainly states the fact to which He has again and again referred: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." The startled disciples are eager to learn who the traitor can be. By a simple sign, Jesus makes it evident to Peter and John that the traitor is one of those who is partaking of the same meal with Him. At the same time, He addresses Judas and commands him to delay no longer in carrying out his foul purpose; but in doing so, He uses words which leave the mission of Judas unknown to the disciples: "What thou doest, do quickly." John tells us that Judas "went out straightway"; and he adds significantly, "and it was night." Judas' opportunities of knowing and believing in Christ were unsurpassed. But alas! He resisted the Light, he cherished his sin of greed, and he was untouched by the matchless love of the Master. And so, under the influence of Satan, he went out into the night of his eternal disgrace and doom.



Jesus naturally begins His farewell discourse (verses 31-38) by a statement of His departure (verses 31-33), but He also adds a command (verses 34-35) and a warning (verses 36-39). This announcement of His going away is stated, however, in terms which the disciples are slow to understand. He was to be "glorified" – which meant that He was to be revealed as the Savior and the Divine Son of God, by His death and resurrection and ascension, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gives His followers, as a parting word, a "new commandment." It was, in fact, the old commandment in which Moses had summarized the whole law; but Jesus made it "new" by giving it a new standard and a new motive: "Love one another; even as I have loved you." His love was to be shown in His death for others, and such self-sacrificing love being shown by His followers is the witness to the world of true discipleship.

Peter did not understand what Jesus meant by saying, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." He did understand the command to love; but he thought that Jesus was about to undertake some dangerous journey upon earth, and so he declares that his love is so great that he will follow and lay down his life for his Master. Jesus gives the solemn warning that before the dawn, Peter will deny Him three times. He does predict, however, that Peter will follow Him afterward. How weak His lonely disciples were to be! How much they needed the promises of the chapters which immediately follow! And when the Spirit had been given in Pentecostal power, how truly did Peter follow his Master – even to the cross! It is by the power of the same Holy Spirit that we can show the love of true disciples, and follow the footsteps of our Lord without denying Him.

Thank You, Jesus, for the wonder of Your love, for there was and is nothing in ourselves that is worthy of His love wherewith You love us to the end! Amen.