

The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

The Big-Shots and Their Servant

Matthew 26.1-16

April 4, 2017

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would 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, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.⁶ So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter."⁸ Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."⁹ Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."¹¹ For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know 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, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you."¹⁶ "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him."¹⁷ "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."¹⁸ "I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'¹⁹ "From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He."²⁰ "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me."

We've been looking at the cast of characters in The Four Gospels. Our GOAL is to get to know the MAIN Character and each encounter shows us another facet of Jesus Christ's Identity and His Work.

We've met TODAY'S characters before. Now they're in Jerusalem and everyone knows something's UP!

Jerusalem is packed with people and the public is clamoring for a king. And Jesus Christ knows

that in hours He'll be arrested... So, He leaves all the crowds and applause and the excitement and the maelstrom ...and He retreats with His friends (one of whom will betray Him) and they settle in to eat the Passover meal in a second story, rented room.

John alone (the insider) John gives us 5 chapters of conversation that takes place around that dinner table and that long discussion (Upper Room Discourse) begins with ... a paradoxical action... something the Leader does that HE has no business DOING... something ... odd... a breach of custom so unexpected and contrary to the way things are supposed to be, it leaves the disciples speechless and shocked. The King becomes the Foot-washer.

This famous passage is a key to the life of freedom that Jesus Christ offers people. The strange gesture He performs is highly significant and if we don't get the lesson it teaches, we cannot live the authentic Christian life. I want to look at this mysterious action and the three explanations Jesus gives for His surprising conduct:

- 1) A THEOLOGICAL explanation
- 2) A PRACTICAL explanation
- 3) A CONDITIONAL explanation

The dinner has started (v.2, "during the supper") and no one volunteered. Someone should have volunteered but no one volunteered. The disciples are perhaps thinking, "WE are with a Head of State and WE should have service-people to do these things... and I'm sure in just a few days when these crowds finish their holiday partying... they'll make our Rabbi KING and then ...WE'LL have servants to wash our feet and dry-clean our shirts but for now ... we'll have to go ... unwashed... until the servants arrive."

So, the meal begins and that's when it happens. Jesus Christ gets up and clothes Himself in the uniform of a maid... a shoe-shine boy.

And it's just... weird... it doesn't feel right ... some servant should be shining HIS shoes! And then... He comes to Peter and Peter (as he often does) Peter voices what everyone else is thinking but is afraid to say. (2 comments) FIRST, (v. 6) "This is weird, Lord... Do YOU (high up!) wash MY (low down) feet?" as if to say, "This isn't how it's supposed to be with You and me! YOU are up there and I am down here."

And Jesus says, "What I (HIGH) DO you (LOW) do not REALIZE now, but ...you will"

Then Peter's second objection: "NO! You will NEVER wash my feet! YOU WILL NOT LOWER YOURSELF IN THIS humiliating WAY... NEVER!" and the Rabbi answers, "If I don't humble MYSELF we can't be friends because THIS IS WHY I CAME INTO THE WORLD... THIS IS THE MEANING OF MY COMING!!

"You mean you came be a foot-washer...?"

“No... I came to humble myself.”

Then Peter acts like he gets it but he doesn't... because the “later” hasn't come yet... that would come only after the Cross and the resurrection and the revelation of Who it is they were dealing with these three years.

It's a theological explanation: the washing is EMBLEMATIC, i.e. a sign or a symbol of what Jesus Christ is about...symbolic of God's Being and Nature.

Jesus Christ is God incarnate humbling Himself to live the life of love that we all have failed to live and come to die in the place of the ... the guilty.

He gets up from the table... lays aside His robe and dresses like a bus-boy... It's a symbol: GOD GETS UP FROM HIS THRONE... lays aside His prerogatives... and veils His GOD-ness in our humanity.

And yet, our humanity doesn't hide the true nature of God, it actually reveals the heart of God: God is a servant, God is LOVE... to love is to serve. That's the nature of God and now ... in that second-story room... we see it : IT'S A REVELATION! God is the Giver, the Foot-washer, the Humble King...

WE thought God was needy/insecure WE thought God was hungry... that to get along with God... we had to feed Him... had to carry the vestal-virgin up the mountain and throw her in to the volcano and then run back down and hope and beg and pray that God was satisfied... WE thought God wants His pound of flesh and those who give it to Him make Him happiest!

BUT Jesus Christ is demonstrating what the Hebrew Prophets taught: e.g. Psalm 50 where God says, “If I were hungry I would not tell you; the world is mine and all it contains... (the cattle on a 1000 hills)” I'm not needy and demanding and insecure!

And this is a huge challenge to Peter's theology. This is the teaching of GRACE. God doesn't need us or need anything we can give Him... GOD IS SELF-SATISFIED. He's the source of satisfaction.

God comes to earth in Jesus Christ, not to GET but to GIVE... not to judge but to save... not “to BE served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mk 10.45)

Next: the PRACTICAL explanation. Not only is this an EMBLEM but also an EXAMPLE. “I just showed you how to love and I want YOU to imitate that.”

And Jesus offers a very definite logic for our imitation of this love. V. 13 “You call me Teacher and Lord... and I am. (YOU YOURSELVES SAY that I am above you and it's true... YOU DON'T YET KNOW exactly what that means but SOON YOU WILL).”

Soon you'll see WHO I really am and then you'll know what happened here: that this was God humbling Himself to serve you and that means the Infinite/Eternal/Unchangeable Spirit...lowered Himself ... infinitely... God took the role of servant.

“And (here's the LOGIC) if I (the Master) lowered MYSELF infinitely for you...then can't you (the servants) lower yourselves a few INCHES for others?”

If you find some person you believe to be in some way lower than you...(and I KNOW what you're thinking: “I don't look down on anyone!” It's like Dostoyevsky said, “I love humanity ...but I can't stand my next door neighbor!”) ...and if you could somehow measure the moral distance or social distance or intellectual difference between you and that lower person... if that distance could be measured in wattage ... THE other person... with bad teeth or bad grammar or that judgmental religious hypocrite or that angry lesbian activist or the snooty pseudo-intellectual pretentious jerk you have to see at family gatherings ...if all the wattage he has is a dim flashlight and YOU with your good teeth (floss twice a day) or your enlightened, open-minded tolerance or your excellent grasp of orthodox Christian doctrine IF THAT MAKES YOU a bright 100-watt-bulb ... but God THE INFINITE SPIRIT is brighter than a trillion suns... and in Jesus Christ... God dimmed Himself and came down so as not to blind us.

The King of Creation humbled Himself by becoming a part of creation...the Creator becomes creature.

He who was equal to God... God the Son, lowered Himself infinitely. So can't you turn down your little bulb and serve others... without acting or speaking or thinking that you're better than they are?

Why do you call me Master (implying that I AM superior to you) and then act like you're better than I am by refusing to do what I do: i.e. to serve people?

Jesus Christ says, “You are IMPLYING that YOU are superior to ME.”

It's illogical in the extreme. Arrogance is the ultimate absurdity.

The social or moral distance between you and someone you consider a bore or shameless or rude or self-righteous is inches... Why then, when asked to do some lowly act a service for them (like listening) why do you act like you're being asked to cross an ocean?

At most you're stepping over a tiny puddle and God has crossed an infinite divide... follow His example!

Third, a THEOLOGICAL explanation a PRACTICAL explanation and (3rd) a CONDITIONAL explanation. In other words, the practical outworking of this strange act IS conditioned on the THEOLOGICAL – there's an “if” (a condition).

IF the teaching is known only THEN can the example be followed ... Three times Jesus Christ draws attention to this:

v. 7- "you don't realize now but you will hereafter"

v. 12- "Do you KNOW what I have done to you?"

v.17 -"If you KNOW these things, you are blessed if you do them"

If you know WHAT?

Well, if you know WHO this IS who washes the feet of the fishermen...if you get it...receive it...if you believe.

IF, you see and realize the significance of this VERY strange action, the King and Foot-washer... if you see it for the emblem it is, that IN Jesus Christ, God has laid aside His royal robes and put on our humanity... so that we could know His humility... you have to know who He is... and be a recipient of GRACE.

AND this knowing is more than a purely intellectual apprehension...it is, in a way, a sharing in the knowledge that MOVED Jesus Christ Himself to serve on that momentous night.

IN A SENSE, Jesus is saying, "If you know the way I know..."

The passage starts with the words: "Jesus, KNOWING His hour had come, KNOWING that He should leave this world and return to the Father (THEN AGAIN in v.3) KNOWING that the Father had given all things into HIS hands, KNOWING that He had COME FROM GOD and WAS GOING BACK to God, He rose from the supper"

This is the BIGGEST PARADOX in the text... we expect it to say, "Jesus, knowing His high position called His men to serve Him..."

But instead, because He knew His place therefore Jesus Christ was secure enough to serve. KNOWING, therefore, HE IS SERVING.

He knows WHO HE IS... what He is come to do... what awaits Him when His work is completed... knows that HE IS TOTALLY secure in the love of the Father, in the strength and plan of the Father... He has nothing to prove... He is completely safe and confident... because His Father will vindicate Him.

And for us the point is: only IF we get it ... can we do it. The Son of God has stripped Himself of His Sonship that I might now enjoy this level of security... God has served me, Jesus Christ has given Himself for me.

And I KNOW...I see...that I am a great sinner and Jesus Christ is a great Savior. HE HAS STOOPED to serve me ... God has dimmed His glory.

In one way, I have the lowest self-esteem anyone can imagine... I am the lowest of men, better than NO ONE, the chief of sinners, the orphan and rebel, the vandalizer of shalom... a child of wrath (as Paul says, Eph 2.1-3) ...not a dim bulb...a broken bulb.

But I have also found the highest self-esteem ... I am adopted as a child of God... "safe and secure from all alarm"... God has embraced me and no one can take that away...totally secure (Rom 8.33ff) IN Christ!

I know from whence I have come... and I know my destiny ... know that I have been redeemed...know what I am now doing...and I know a new identity that FREES me to love in a new way. (Annoyances are not so annoying when I am KNOWING... ..Sacrifices don't feel so sacrificial.... Insults don't really matter... Applause and recognition is less addictive)...When I see/know/believe, everything else is small...and grace IS big.

I'm able to lower myself...without being condescending... able to give myself without having to be repaid...without having to watch the clock.

It enables you to actually listen to people...not just waiting for a break so you can speak. It opens a path that is neither censorious nor licentious... not ignoring difficult stuff (Jesus had difficult stuff on His mind (21)...not ignoring and not obsessing.

I know what it is to be loved (to have my guilt removed and to know God as Father)... and to the degree that I AM knowing that, I am free to rise from the table, lay aside my rights and wash the feet of anyone in need.

"It's just the same story as a doctor once told me," observed the elder. "He was a man getting on in years, and undoubtedly clever. He spoke as frankly as you, though in jest, in bitter jest. 'I love humanity,' he said, 'but I wonder at myself. The more I love humanity in general, the less I love man in particular. In my dreams,' he said, 'I have often come to making enthusiastic schemes for the service of humanity, and perhaps I might actually have faced crucifixion if it had been suddenly necessary; and yet I am incapable of living in the same room with anyone for two days together, as I know by experience. As soon as anyone is near me, his personality disturbs my self-complacency and restricts my freedom. In twenty-four hours I begin to hate the best of men: one because he's too long over his dinner; another because he has a cold and keeps on blowing his nose. I become hostile to people the moment they come close to me. But it has always happened that the more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity.'

- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

