



May 6, 2007

Is Knowledge Enough?

Last week I spent a little time talking about the church year and how it brings order to our study of God's word and the growth of our faith. As I open my church year guide this week I smiled when I saw the Gospel reading, now please understand I didn't know exactly what the words of the Gospel were when I saw John 13:31-35. I hope some day to be able to do that some of the older, wiser individuals I've met over the years, but I knew the context of John 13 right away you see, John 13 was engrained in my mind on August 6, 1983. Now when I say that you may think that I attended a revival or some great seminar, nope, it was a church service that did change my life forever but the preacher wasn't some world renowned orator no, actually the preacher hadn't officially been ordained yet. The service was my wedding, the preacher was my brother John he gave the message, dad did the vows but what a message.

He used John 13; now let me just set the stage of John 13 for you, give you the context. It's Maundy Thursday at the beginning of John 13 and Jesus is meeting with His disciples to celebrate the Passover feast. They've sat down to eat when John records, "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power and that He had come from God and was returning to God." Jesus knows that all things are under His power so what does He do? John presents it as a cause and effect. The cause is Jesus knew that all things were under His power and the effect the very next verse, "so He got up from the meal, took out His outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that He poured water in to a basin and began to wash His disciples feet drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him." Now isn't that an odd use of all power? You know what happened; He washes the disciples' feet, He comes to

peter and Peter says, "No you shall never wash my feet." Please understand Peter wasn't being rude or challenging he spoke out of humility and out of love and respect He was basically saying, "you're my Lord you're not washing my feet." Jesus gently corrects him and says, "Unless I wash you, you have no part in me." Notice Jesus didn't say, "If I don't wash your feet you have no part of me." He says, "Unless I wash you." This foot washing is symbolic of what Jesus is about to do, He is about to shed His blood to wash away our sins. Peter picks up the little change and he says, "Then also wash my hands and my head." Basically he's saying, "Wash me I want to be a part of you." When Jesus finished He explained what he has done. He's given them a tremendous object lesson He says, "You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am now that I your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. You are to become the servant of all." Just as I became your servant here and I am going to become the servant of all as I go to the cross.

Well, the disciples ate dinner, which was the first Lord's Supper, and, when they're done Jesus sums up the foot washing the Holy Communion, the whole Passover feast. He says, "A new command I give you love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." The message; love as I have loved you. I remember John looking at me and saying, "I know you love Marjie if you love her as much as Jesus loves you, you will not put yourself first, you will kneel down wash her feet. You will be attentive to her needs." By the way Marjie and I had been dating for almost 6 years and John knew her pretty well and she got the same message but boy did it hit home. Jesus loved His disciples so much that He became their servant, symbolically by washing their feet and in reality when He went to the cross and gave everything up for them. If I am to love I am to love like Him.

The result of that message well, for me it was three-fold. Number one I consider it to be the greatest text for wedding messages and I've used it several times. Number two while I've not actually had to wash Marjie's feet, if rubbing them counts then I might be able to apply for sainthood some day and number three, whenever the Bible speaks about love and servant hood I really know what it means; which leads to the question "is that knowledge enough?" Is

knowledge enough and the answer is found in our New Testament reading this morning in Acts 11. We find Peter in Jerusalem, he's basically at a voter's meeting and there are those in the congregation who have some serious questions about what Peter did in the previous chapter. In fact, they don't just question him they criticize him. Now, you might be asking yourself what in the world did Peter do this time? Verse 3 sums up the problem the people say he went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them. Many times when we read the book of Acts we become envious of the church at that time, it was growing faster than wild fire in California during a drought year. Acts chapter 2 Peter preaches a sermon and what happens? Three thousand people are baptized but Luke records for us and tells us what that early church was like he describes it this way, "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayer everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need. Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."

That sounds really good. Who wouldn't want to be in a church like that? Yet, nine chapters later, Peter I guess you could say the pastor is being criticized publicly for eating with Gentiles. What's wrong with this picture? I guess you could say that in certain areas the people didn't really believe that what they believed was really real. They knew that Jesus had given the command to make disciples of all nations, they knew that He had said this gospel must be preached throughout all the world and then the end would come they had the knowledge yet, they didn't want to cross the race barrier and accept the Gentiles into the church accept them as equal brothers and sisters in God's kingdom. They weren't alone, Peter himself was there God had to give him a vision, a vision of a blanket, which represented the world, a blanket that had all these unclean animals on it; those unclean animals represented all the races in the world. God told him to eat and to Peter, a Jew, he says no way! Those are all unclean if I eat it I make it a part of myself I can't do that. Three times God gave the vision and three times God says, "What I have made clean is no longer unclean." And then finally after

three visions the spirit literally tell Peter to go with the Gentile men who are now coming to his door. Why did these men come to his door? Well, in the previous chapter we see that there was a man named Cornelius, a Centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment, he and all of his family were devout and god-fearing he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about 3 in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, "Cornelius." Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God now send men to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter, He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved."

After the vision three times and after the spirit tells him go, Peter goes with these men and he shares the good news with these Gentiles. The result, Peter says, "As I began to speak the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us in the beginning then I remembered what the Lord had said, 'John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,' so if God gave them the same as He gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to think that I could oppose God." Obviously Peter had just completed a Lifelight lesson on Jonah and realized you do not want to oppose God's will and neither did those who criticized him because we see in the very next verse when they heard this they have no further objections and praised God saying, "so then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

There are several lessons here. One of them you really have to look at it to find it. Did you notice the fulfillment of the prophecy when Peter said, "then I remembered what the Lord had said John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Peter remembered Jesus had told them, "I will give you the Holy Spirit and He will bring to your remembrance all that I have said." When Peter remembered Christ's' prophecy about the coming of the Holy Spirit and his job is fulfilled. But second having knowledge of God isn't enough, like Peter in the early church, once we are aware of the truths of God's word we are to live it. We can't hold onto our customs or onto our old beliefs or onto whatever is our hang up once we see what God's word says and we have the knowledge of it we must act on it. Third we are to love everyone and be the servant of everyone not for our sake but for their sake and for the sake of God

who has loved us. We love others by crossing whatever borders Satan has created, cross those borders and bring God's truth to those on the other side. God's truth, which is expressed in word His Holy word and our words when we repeat His word and in deed. May we truly bring God's truth in word and deed to all those who God brings before us.

In our Savior's name, Amen.