

Theme: Jesus washes the disciples feet.

The first verse reads, “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world, and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” This first verse serves as a change of emphasis in that from now on St John’s gospel story is of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. The first verse also tells us that this took place before the festival of the Passover, which is different to the other three gospels which tell us that these events took place at the festival of the Passover. In John’s Gospel, Jesus will die on the Day of Preparation for the Passover, see chapter 19 verse 31. Also, up until now Jesus kept saying, “My hour has not yet come.” Whereas now Jesus says, “My hour has come.” Jesus’ hour is the time of his glorification, which in all the Gospels means his death, resurrection, and ascension.

We are also told in verse 1 that his hour had come to go to the Father, just as he earlier came from the Father so he will return to his Father. In chapter 3 verse 16 we have, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The last sentence of verse 1 reads, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Here he is saying that his love for those who believe in him knows no bounds. Jesus came into the world to save his people who he loves, it was for his love for us that he came, and he loves us so much that in the end he performed the unimaginable sacrifice, he gave his life for us on the cross so that we might live.

Now in verse 2 we are told that the devil has put into the heart of Judas to betray Jesus. The fact that the devil has chosen to tempt Judas in no way relieves Judas of his responsibility for his betrayal. The devil tempts each of us daily, but accomplishes nothing without our cooperation. That is not to say that resisting temptation is easy, because we know that it isn’t. But regardless of temptation we are responsible for our sins.

St John then tells us that, “During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God.” Jesus is aware that he is moving toward the cross, so it seems odd to hear that the Father has “given all things into his hands.” Rather it would seem instead that the Father is giving Jesus into the hands of his enemies who will crucify him. But Jesus has been trying to prepare his disciples for the cross for quite some time, the last time being chapter 12 verse 7 just before our reading where Jesus tells Judas to leave Mary alone because she was anointing his feet ready for his burial. We must also remember that the cross will not represent defeat for Jesus, but will represent victory. It is the place where he will accomplish the work for which he has come into the world. It is the place where his glorification will begin.

The last part of verse 3 reads, “and that he had come from God, and was going to God.” Earlier In chapter 1 verse 14 we read, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son. Full of grace and truth.” Jesus came into this world from God for a purpose, to save us from sin and death, and once his purpose had been fulfilled, he returned to God.

It is in verse 4 that we are told that Jesus, 'got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself'. Jesus did this in preparation for washing the disciples feet. Now it is important to know that on arrival at a house the lowest person available would wash the feet of people coming into a house. Foot washing would act as a welcome to the house in the same way that we would welcome people to our homes. It was an important social requirement in Israel at that time. In this case the tradition was neglected possibly due to the excitement of sitting down to a meal with Jesus, but now, halfway through the meal Jesus, much to the embarrassment of the disciples, takes up the role of foot washing. Washing the feet of another person was considered so menial a task that only Gentile slaves were required to do it. Disciples might on occasion wash their rabbi's feet of their own volition, but cannot be required to do so. Foot washing is a gracious act of hospitality for guests who have walked dusty roads to their destination, but is seldom if ever rendered personally by the host.

Jesus in preparing to wash the disciples feet was taking the lowest social position in the house, he was acting as a servant or as a slave. We are then told that he poured water into a bowl and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. All went well until he came to Simon Peter, who said to him. "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him. "You will never wash my feet." Jesus responds decisively to Peter's refusal. "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Jesus is saying that he will have nothing more to do with him, he will effectively be cast out.

There is clearly much more than just foot washing going on here, Jesus is giving the disciples clear instructions that they haven't been chosen to become like royalty, treated with the greatest respect who cannot be spoken to unless they speak first. No' their role is as humble servants. But of course, the real example of humble service would come a bit later on, when Jesus humbly sacrifices his life for us on the cross at Calvary for the salvation of all mankind. But as Jesus said to Peter "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." And indeed, after Jesus' resurrection Peter did understand because he gave the rest of his life unconditionally to the Lord.

Simon Peter response to Jesus' words is, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head." Peter in his usual exuberant way, begins running full tilt in the other direction. If being washed by Jesus is essential to his relationship with Jesus, Peter wants to be washed all over from head to foot. But Jesus calms him down by saying, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet." Walking in the middle east in sandals in the dusty streets only makes one's feet dirty. Jesus then adds when speaking to Peter, "And you are clean." But then adds, "Though not all of you." He said this because he knew that Simon Iscariot would betray him, even so in his love for him he bathed Simon Iscariot's feet.

After Jesus had washed all their feet, had put on his robe again and returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" Well of course they didn't fully understand, but like Simon Peter they will have a clearer understanding after the resurrection, when they realise that Jesus' death on the cross at Calvary was the greatest act of unselfish love in laying down his life for the sins of all mankind. But Jesus moves on and

confirms that as their teacher and their Lord, he has washed their feet, so they ought to wash one another's feet, and Jesus says, "For I have set you an example."

Jesus then goes on to say, "Very truly I tell you." This phrase, 'very truly I tell you,' has to be interpreted as, 'vital information that you must remember.' So, they must remember that servants are not greater than their masters, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them, which means that humility and love are two essential ingredients of a true Christian.

Finally verse 31 reads, "When he, that is Judas, had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him.'" When Judas left the upper room he effectively set in motion the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of Man, and it was at his resurrection from the dead that Jesus Christ was glorified, and through Jesus, God also had been glorified.

The message for us today is very clear, as servants and messengers of the word of God we are to exercise love and humility, particularly humility, in spreading the gospel of Christ.

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