

The Greatest of These Shall Serve

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[0:00] We're going to start tonight on our second lesson looking at the inner sanctuary.

! The last words of Christ to His followers, to His disciples.! Taking place in the upper room. We're going to be covering this year and who knows, in the next year maybe, but John chapter 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17.

And all that really takes place in a short span of time, but it is rich. It's the gold nuggets that we're going to pick up and put in our pocket, I hope, and carry with us all of our days.

And so we're going to continue tonight in examining the last words of the Lord Jesus. All this taking place just prior to His arrest and ultimately His crucifixion and all occurring, as I said, in the upper room, we think.

Last week, we actually made it all the way through John chapter 13, verse 1. And in that verse of inspired Scripture, this is what we studied.

[1:25] 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.

And we focused on the fact that Jesus has a very special love for His own that are left in the world. He had that special love for those left at the time of His ascension. And that's really going to last in the time of His return for His church.

And that certainly covers every believer in this room. As astonishing as that fact may be, we come today to an incident that occurred in the life of Christ while He was in the upper room with this small band of followers.

And to say the least, it is both impressive and instructive. The next verse there says, during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him.

[2:51] And I'll stop there, although there's a comma there after Him, and that Him is Jesus. Because in the first verse that we studied last time, we bask in this glorious light of our Lord's love.

The love for His own that were being left in the world. And now, we have been transported into verse 2, where we actually are entering into regions of satanic darkness.

Because we're going to peer into the heart of Judas Iscariot. We're going to do that a little this evening. We're going to do a little bit next week. Then we will move on from there.

In Luke's Gospel, we learn that before this band of followers gathered in the upper room, Judas had already met with the chief priests and made a very foul agreement with them.

He would hand over to them for trial and execution, very God of very God. Our Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

[4:07] Now, there is an infinite gulf which separates the love of Christ with that stark hatred of Judas.

And by peering into that dark heart, I believe for us, the actions of Jesus that we'll study tonight really do appear all the more glorious.

He was aware of the thoughts and the plans of Judas. And nevertheless, the Lord Jesus goes forward with a plan so magnificent that what He's going to do could never originate in the dark heart of any man.

If we were writing a fictional account, we couldn't dream this stuff up. Another one of the proofs of Scripture I've often said, if I was writing a fictional account of God sending His Son, first of all, I wouldn't have Him born in a stable and laid in a manger.

I'd have Him in a palace of gold and, you know, typical stuff. But here's another, more evidence that this is divinely inspired based on what Jesus is actually going to do, knowing full well that at that very moment He's being betrayed unto death.

[5:37] And He was fully aware of that. Verse 3 has this to say, 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.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus knew. Jesus knew. And I'm told in the original language, it is not merely that Jesus knew some facts concerning what was about to take place, but rather it is because He knew those facts, He was now engaged in an act that really goes beyond our human ability to grasp in full measure.

And we can list those things that Jesus knew like this. He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands.

The Father gave Him everything. He also knew that He had come from God, that He had an eternal past with the Father in glory, and He knew that He was going back to God where He would again sit at His right hand in full, unexpressible splendor.

A splendor that we can only hint at in this life. And because He knew all of these things, and because He loved His own who would be in the world for generations prior to His return, while He's in heaven, we'll be here, although He didn't leave us as orphans, we know that.

[7:37] But because of this, He does the unimaginable. And this is what we couldn't make up.

Scripture says this, verse 4, He got up from supper and laid aside His garments and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

Jesus is about to be exalted. But John reveals here the depth of His humility.

That's another proof of the authenticity of Scripture. If we were writing a fictional account, God wouldn't be humble. If you wrote the Koran, that's not a humble God, is it?

None of the writings teach a humble God. It's a far-off God, an unapproachable God, an angry God.

One of my very dearest friends is a Muslim, Hakim Janna.

We've flown all over the world together. We've had vigorous discussions. And he almost cringes when I called God Father. He can't do that. He said, oh, that's too familiar.

[8:52] You can't do that. Well, we can. So here we're going to see John reveal the depth of his humility. This is a humility that few humans would ever conceive of, much less initiate or participate in.

Here we have the glorious Creator, the very ruler and power of the universe in the presence of fallen men and he lays aside his garments and he girds himself with a towel.

He wraps a towel. And you know, if you really focus, you can see this scene in your mind's eye. You can actually see this.

And you can see every eye of the disciples fixed on the Lord as he gets up and he's doing this and they're breathless.

And their hearts beat and our hearts should beat as those of his followers did at the scene that is unfolding before them.

[10:13] I think that the words of Dr. Carson are very instructive here. With such power and status at his disposal, we might have expected him to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath and instead we're going to see him wash his disciples' feet including the feet of the betrayer.

I can almost not say those words much less conceive of them and view it in my thought life including the feet of the betrayer.

I was reminded of the lyrics of Chris Tomlin last night, Amazing Love, How Can It Be? I won't sing it, but I was amazed. Christ and his band of men have walked through the dirty streets of Jerusalem and now they have arrived at the upper room their feet were dirty and beyond just dust from Jerusalem they were no doubt offensive.

They smelled. They were doubly offensive because now they're reclining and I won't do that if they won't be able to get up but it was a very special way that the Jews ate this lengthy meal, this feast. They're reclining and it was their feet are basically exposed and stunk and it was the custom that the lowest most menial slave the guy that is rock bottom would wash the feet of those present.

[12:24] That was the custom. That was his job. And who knows? Maybe Jesus was hoping deep down that one of the followers would volunteer for this duty.

Of course none did. This was proof of his words in Matthew 23.11 They had fallen on deaf ears when he said the greatest among you shall be your servant.

The greatest among you will serve. And instead the thing their hearts most focus on was which one the Lord would declare them to be the greatest among them.

They were campaigning for that. They were campaigning for that. Here is some I looked up some what I would call sadly supporting scriptures.

Luke 22:24 And there arose also a dispute among them which one of them was regarded to be the greatest. We have a similar passage in Mark 9:34 But they kept silent for on the way they had discussed with one another which one of them was the greatest.

[13:46] Can you see these guys as Jesus is walking and they're kind of pulling back and they're whispering He knows what they're saying He's God. And they're saying He thinks it's you or is it me or which one of us?

But the definitive passage is in Matthew 20 verse 20-24 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee If you've got a Jewish mother get her to go to bat for you.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons bowing down and making a request of him and he said to her what do you wish?

She said to him command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on your right and one on your left.

That's pretty bold isn't it? But Jesus answered you do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup?

[14:51] I think he's turned to John and James are you able to drink the cup that I'm about to drink? And they said to him another bold statement we are able and he said to them my cup you shall drink.

Well what a cup it was going to be. But to sit on my right hand and on my left that is not mine to give but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father.

Typical. And hearing this the ten became indignant with the two brothers. So they're going to have a fist fight breakout. Trying to decide which one or two are the greatest because Jesus has two sides right?

So back in the upper room Jesus had gotten up from the table and he girded himself with a towel. The others are still reclining.

And they're watching all this transpire. And as I said this is the normal Jewish position for such a feast. And every eye is on him and here's what Jesus does next.

[16:09] Verse 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.

Now when you read that, when you listen to that here, when you read it at home in your closet, remember who it is that's washing these feet.

It's the Lord Christ. It's the creator of the universe. And he now has assumed the position of the lowest of the lowest slave.

Because this was reserved for the lowest slave. what a rebuke that is to the very proud ambitious spirit that was on display among the disciples.

This was a rebuke. And this action no doubt ended any discussion among them about who's the greatest. I mean, if this is what the greatest has to do, none of them wanted that position, did they?

[17:31] Is there any action imaginable that will humble the pride of man?

Okay, you want to be my servant? You want to be the greatest? I've got a lot of dirty feet in this room. We need to worship. The Lord of glory stoops down and washes the dirty feet of the disciples.

God's And again, can we really picture this scene without stirring up within us the deepest of emotions?

Because if we'd been in that room, he'd have come by to worship ours. Can we fail to receive the deep spiritual instruction from this scene?

He fashioned the world and the scripture has just told us that the father has given all things into his hands.

[18:41] He owns it all. and those hands that the Father has given everything to are the very hands that the Lord of glory now washes the feet of His disciples the same hands John the Baptist once declared that he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose the latchet of the sandals of the Lord Jesus he said I'm not worthy to do that but Jesus not only unloosens the shoes of His followers He removes those shoes and then He proceeds to wash their feet and they were nasty this is really a scene with rebuke and the embarrassed disciples watch it all

I believe in painful silence the Lord of glory is now clad as a slave and He washes the feet of all including the betrayer and of course they didn't know who that was yet but they soon would the very man that's going to bring about His death by betraying Him He washes His feet as well and Jesus knew in full detail what Judas had done He knew about His meetings and He knew what He was about to do and that it was going to happen that night within a very few hours and then Jesus comes to our friend Simon Peter you've got to love Simon there's a little Simon in all of us isn't there?

my wife tried to beat it out on me but it's in there you know Peter was never at a loss for words I don't remember a time he was ever stunned into silence none of the other followers have uttered a word of protest they may have internalized that but Jesus had washed their feet and now it's Peter's turn before the Lord can wash Peter's feet Peter's got a question Peter always had questions didn't he?

so he came to Simon Peter and he said Lord did you wash my feet? now that's English that's English in the original language we would have heard Peter I think in shock exclaim Lord thou my feet mine and again let's put this into a Jewish context the men in the upper room are waiting for the ushering in of the kingdom with the exception of Judas they believe they have found the king and now they can hardly wait until he establishes his kingdom kicks out the Romans sits on a throne and builds little thrones for them so they can sit next to him that was their messianic view that was their messianic view they saw they saw

Messiah come overthrow whoever was oppressing him at the time and establish his kingdom what they didn't see was the parenthesis of the church and Gentiles being brought into the church they didn't see that so they're waiting for the kingdom and in their minds it is upon them it's upon them and Peter without question is appalled at the sight of the divine king engaging in an act of self-abasement and that's really what's going on here there are a number of kings on this earth and queens and they don't do this do they they don't do this in neither Jewish culture nor in Roman culture did a superior wash the feet of an inferior

[23 : 30] I always remember a guy used to be a member of this church and he's done well in life and on Christmas they were going out and every year the more prominent people would open up their homes to show off their Christmas decorations and their lights and they'd go in and have cider and all that and it was time for him and his wife to leave with another couple and he wouldn't go to the great embarrassment of his wife and she said what's wrong and he said did you see the list those people are all inferior to me I'm not I'm going to go into their home he used to be a member of this church he said if they were above me I would go in because I want them to see me there but I'm not going to go into a subordinate's home and celebrate with them he had left before that well well Jesus anticipated

Peter's objection Jesus always had an answer usually directed at Peter but he had an answer and Jesus answered and said to him what I do you do not realize now but you will understand hereafter Peter I'm doing something that you're not going to have a clue right now but the time will come when you will understand hereafter and he did understand hereafter in fact you can read his books and see that understanding Peter would only would know only in part what the Lord was doing that night but after the death burial resurrection and ascension of Christ

Peter and the other true disciples would finally realize that in the incarnation the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many he would ultimately come to that realization but as always it was often the case with Peter all too often Peter goes too far Peter had that foot and mouth problem didn't he and a lot of us have that problem and I'm the chief sinner among you he declares to the Lord in verse 8 never shall you wash my feet never are you going to wash my feet so it reminds me of William Carey when he was called and he's the father of modern missions and he was called to India and he was speaking to a friend pastor friend and telling him he said why would you go to India he said

India won't be a Christian nation for at least a thousand years to which William Carey said well you're not giving God much credit he said oh I was leaving God out of the equation I didn't even think about him he said well if God's not in the equation then it won't happen in ten thousand years God has to be in the equation it's easy to say never that that may not be true Peter says never you're going to wash my feet and you know there's a way perhaps an angle here that maybe we look at Peter's response with a note that is somewhat praiseworthy based upon his modesty maybe we would like to say with Peter Lord you're not going to wash my feet I'm not worthy I'm the chief of

sinner we could do all that but in truth and I never really thought of that in any depth until I was studying for this you know what

Peter's really done he's entered into an act of disobedience he's now being disobedient the Lord comes up ready to wash Peter's feet he's washed everybody else's that's Peter's turn he says you're never going to wash my feet Peter is now being disobedient and more than one of the Puritans I've discovered believed that Peter at this point was now acting apart from humility and his pride and we know Peter had pride right his pride is starting to enter in it is never true humility to refuse what the Lord offers to do for us okay the Lord wants to do something for us and clearly outlined in scripture and we say no that's not humility it's disobedience

[29:05] Peter now is being disobedient here are the words of an old Scottish minister I may be relating to him because I'm part of the Ross clan Charles Ross he wrote this 150 years ago the truest humility is reverentially to accept and thankfully to acknowledge all the blessings of his grace oh let us take care lest under the garb of a false humility but really in the spirit of self-righteous pride we'd be spurning away from us the tokens of the Savior's love the Lord is acting out of love for his disciples Peter really now has spurned that so you're not going to wash my feet I'm better than these they should have let you wash their feet either but they did but I'm not going to let you do that that's where we're at and our Lord has an answer for Peter and the answer is this if I do not wash you you have no part with me wow that's quite an answer and Jesus is going to explain to Peter what he was doing why he had just washed her and then

Jesus immediately after this is going to unmask the identity of the betrayer but I have to tell you guys we're going to save that for next time