

Lesson Nineteen

(John 13:1-38)

The other gospels discuss many events which John does not. And between chapter 12 and chapter 13 several important things happen, among them these: Judas makes a secret agreement with the Jewish authorities to betray Jesus (Luke 22:3-6). Jesus gives the disciples directions on where to prepare the Passover meal or Paschal supper (Luke 22:7-13). And as they assembly in an upstairs room of a home at Jerusalem, Jesus eats the Passover meal with the apostles and institutes what we lovingly call, "The Lord's Supper" (Luke 22:14-23). There is an argument among the apostles over which of them would be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom, so the Lord reprimands them both by word (Luke 22:24-30) and by example (13:1-20).

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

(John 13:1-20)

¹It was now the day before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the

Father. He had always loved those in the world who were his own, and he loved them to the very end.

²Jesus and his disciples were at supper. The Devil had already put the thought of betraying Jesus into the heart of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ³Jesus knew that the Father had given him complete power; he knew that he had come from God and was going to God. ⁴So he rose from the table, took off his outer garment, and tied a towel around his waist. ⁵Then he poured some water into a washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Are you going to wash my feet, Lord?"

Jesus answered him, "You do not understand now what I am doing, but you will understand later."

⁸Peter declared, "Never at any time will you wash my feet!"

"If I do not wash your feet," Jesus answered, "you will no longer be my disciple."

⁹Simon Peter answered, "Lord, do not wash only my feet, then! Wash my hands and head, too!"

¹⁰Jesus said, "Anyone who has taken a bath is completely clean and does not have to wash himself, except for his feet. All of you are clean — all except one." (¹¹Jesus already knew who was going to betray him; that is why he said, "All of you, except one, are clean.")

¹²After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his outer garment back on and returned to his place at the table. "Do you understand what I have just done to you?" he asked. ¹³"You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right that you do so, because that is what I am. ¹⁴I, your Lord and Teacher, have just washed your feet. You, then, should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set an example for you, so that you will do just what I have done for you. ¹⁶I am telling you the truth: no slave is greater than his master, and no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷Now that you know this truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!

¹⁸"I am not talking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the scripture must come true that says, "The man who shared my food turned against me." ¹⁹I tell you this now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe that I Am Who I Am." ²⁰I am telling you the truth: whoever receives anyone I send receives me also; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

The time is probably a Thursday evening, the place a home in Jerusalem. After the disciples engage in a prideful debate about their individual places of authority in Jesus' kingdom (Luke 22:24-30), the Lord decides to show his deep humility and love by washing their feet.

This act is even more meaningful because Jesus knows his time with the apostles is very short, "and he loved them to the very end" (13:1). We are also told that the Devil has a solid grip on the heart of Judas Iscariot, so no time can be wasted. Each moment must be used to the maximum, each opportunity for teaching spiritual truths must be used or lost. So Jesus rises from where he had been reclining, and begins to wash the disciples' feet.

Now, foot washing is not exactly a job for a King or a Messiah. Since people wore only sandals and walked long distances in those days, their feet would be caked with sweat and dirt. A thoughtful host would, of course, see that a slave washed the feet of his guests or, at the least, that water and towels were available to them (1 Tim. 5:10; Luke 7:44; 1 Sam. 25:41). But here is Jesus, the Son of God, humbly and lovingly waiting upon his disciples. It is a dirty, smelly task. And the irony of the situation could not possibly be ignored by the self-centered apostles.

The fact is that each of the apostles has no doubt noticed the waterbowl and the towel placed conveniently near the doorway by the owner of the home. But it was beneath their dignity to volunteer to wash anyone's feet. Besides, that might be interpreted by one of the other men as a "personality weakness" or as an act done by an inferior to a superior.

Unfortunately, that same smug attitude is still alive and well among today's disciples. A man who wants to be an elder is not appointed, so he becomes bitter and works against those leaders. A woman, who helped serve food at a church dinner, sees that the church bulletin leaves her name out and she is offended. A deacon does not get public credit for a particular act of service, so he vows never to do it again. When we are tempted to think of our dignity, we need to visualize our Lord kneeling before the apostles' feet.

As Ralph Sockman wrote, "Pride of spirit is like the light inside our motor cars. When we turn the light on at night, it transforms the windows of the car into mirrors. We can see our reflection, but we cannot see well to drive. We have to turn off the interior light if we wish to get a clear view of the road ahead" (*The Higher Happiness*, p. 28).

As so often happened, it is Peter who learns the hard way what Jesus is teaching. Paul Butler says, regarding Peter's initial refusal to let Jesus wash his feet and Jesus' statement that Peter would later understand, "Peter was in the dangerous position of disobeying Him and distrusting His demands because he did not

understand and therefore letting his own fallible reason be his guide when Jesus had expressed His will in the matter" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 215). So Jesus lets Peter know that he had better learn to think less of himself or he will be on the outside looking in! And Peter, with his characteristic enthusiasm, quickly decides that Jesus is right (13:9).

13:10-11 makes it clear that Jesus has known from the beginning which way Judas was leaning (6:60-71). But Jesus goes ahead and washes his betrayer's feet as a last minute effort to encourage him to change his mind and let the betrayal be accomplished by someone else.

In 13:12-16 Jesus again reclines in the place where he was before. Then he speaks, and you can be sure the disciples are listening! He says, "Men, I'm your Teacher but I have humbly served all of you. Now let that be an example of the attitude you must have." Nothing could be farther from the spirit of what Jesus does here than for us today to make an elaborate *display* of our "humility" by performing this act for a few people in front of a large crowd. There is not the slightest indication that Jesus intends for this act of service to man to be perpetuated as an act of worship to God.

Next, Jesus reveals that one of them is a traitor to the cause (13:18). The reason he informs them is so that they will be even more confident that he is who he claims to be, the divine and unique Son of God (13:19). And they may also be sure that anyone who rejects their gospel message also rejects both the Son and the Father (13:20).

Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

(*John 13:21-30*)

²¹After Jesus had said this, he was deeply troubled and declared openly, "I am telling you the truth: one of you is going to betray me."

²²The disciples looked at one another, completely puzzled about whom he meant. ²³One of the disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was sitting next to Jesus. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to him and said, "Ask him whom he is talking about."

²⁵So that disciple moved closer to Jesus' side and asked, "Who is it, Lord?"

²⁶Jesus answered, "I will dip some bread in the sauce and give it to him; he is the man." So he took a piece of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas, the Son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Hurry and

do what you must!" ²⁸None of the others at the table understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹Since Judas was in charge of the money bag, some of the disciples thought that Jesus had told him to go and buy what they needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor.

³⁰Judas accepted the bread and went out at once. It was night.

Paul Butler rightly observes that "Judas was a master at deception. Outwardly no one could tell the difference between him and the other eleven disciples of Jesus. He was an excellent play-actor (hypocrite). He had even faked a concern for the poor (12:4-5) with such finesse that he prompted the others to criticize Jesus at one time. He had fooled the other eleven completely. When Jesus uttered His solemn warning (v. 21) it fell like a bombshell in the midst of that festive evening. The disciples were startled, incredulous, perplexed and began looking round about at one another in silent suspicion. Judas joined in, skillfully portraying one who was innocently dumbfounded" (*The Gospel of John*, II, 226).

The line drawing in the TEV gives an inaccurate concept of the physical details of this supper. The artist seems to have been influenced more by Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting of "The Last Supper" than by the Greek text and historical accuracy.

For it was customary in those days for people to use a "table" which would roughly correspond in height to our modern "coffee tables" (although they sometimes just placed a quilt-like pad on the floor). The diners then stretched out on pads or couches on the floor, with their heads toward the "table" and their feet toward the wall. Each person lay on his left side or elbow and ate with his right hand. In *The Gospel of John*, II, 226, Paul Butler has the following chart and explanation of the seating arrangements that night:

The New Commandment

(John 13:31-35)

³¹After Judas had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed through him. ³²And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once. ³³My children, I shall not be with you very much longer. You will look for me; but I tell you now what I told the Jewish authorities, 'You cannot go where I am going.' ³⁴And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

The Old Testament told God's people to "love your neighbor as you love yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). But Jesus adds a new dimension to the command as he tells his disciples to love one another "as I have loved you" (13:34). Merely loving those who love us is not enough. Rather, our love must extend to all people everywhere.

It is love which keeps a husband and wife together in a meaningful relationship, but a lack of love creates strife and division. And the same thing is true in regard to God's family, the church. Love for God and for each other is the adhesive which keeps us together (1 John 3:11-18; 4:7-21). As a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), love is to control our actions, "just as Christ loved us and gave his life for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice that pleases God" (Eph. 5:2).

And as Reuel Lemmons reminds us, "Love is to the life of the body of Christ what air is to the life of man. Without it the body of Christ cannot long endure. When love famishes the frigid winds soon chill and kill. While there may still exist the outward appearance of unity and spiritual health, when love is gone the body is dead." Love, then, is the identification badge of the true follower of Jesus (13:35).

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

(John 13:36-38)

³⁶"Where are you going, Lord?" Simon Peter asked him.

"You cannot follow me now where I am going," answered Jesus; "but later you will follow me."

³⁷"Lord, why can't I follow you now?" asked Peter. "I am ready to die for you!"

³⁸ Jesus answered, "Are you really ready to die for me? I am

telling you the truth: before the rooster crows you will say three times that you do not know me."

Peter never suffered from a lack of confidence. He had given up his fishing career to follow Jesus he believed so strongly in Him. And now Peter says that he is willing to make the supreme sacrifice: he is willing to go down fighting. Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter will use his sword to defend Jesus (18:10-11). But he will become confused by Jesus' insistence upon non-violence. And the time will come when, bewildered and alone, Peter tries to hide his discipleship (18:15-18, 25-27).

Thought Stimulators on John 13:1-38

1. What was the attitude of Jesus toward his followers?
2. Who provided the temptation for Judas to betray Jesus?
3. Why did Peter object to Jesus washing his feet, and why did Peter change his mind so quickly?
4. In what way did Jesus prove his love and his humility?
5. When and where did Jesus wash the apostles' feet?
6. How does pride often get in the way of our service to others?
7. Must we always understand the "why" of God's commands before obeying them?
8. How does this practical service of foot washing by Jesus compare with the ceremonial footwashing done by the Pope and by some Protestant churches?
9. Describe the actual seating arrangements during the Passover Meal.
10. How was Jesus able to talk with Judas without the others hearing?
11. What function did Judas perform among the apostles?
12. In what sense is "Love one another" a "new" commandment?
13. What did Jesus say would be the characteristic which would mark people as his disciples?
14. Was Peter really ready to die for Jesus?
15. Discuss how you have been tempted to hide your own discipleship.