

## The Heart of the Savior – John 13:1-17

**Main Idea: Christ; the Lord of all glory became the servant of sinners.**

### **I. A Loving Heart | John 13:1-4**

Chapter 12 concludes Jesus' public discourses, giving rise to what is known as "The Upper Room discourse." The only record of this discourse in the New Testament. **For almost four chapters, John describes what happened in the last few hours Jesus spent with His disciples, resulting in an intimate call to receive and follow Christ not only as Savior, but as an example.** It is Thursday night of the Jewish Passover. In a matter of hours, Jesus will be going to the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples and will be arrested by the Romans, trialed by the religious leaders of Israel, sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, and crucified on Friday, fulfilling what John the Baptist had proclaimed in the very beginning of his ministry, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Following John's narrative, in less than 24 hours Christ will be killed. Those were hours that changed the course of human history. **The events that the disciples witnessed during those few hours with Christ help us see and understand our Savior's heart.** In the upper room, there were 13 men present: Jesus along with His twelve disciples. There was no one else there. It was intentional that only the 12 were present because, on that night, Jesus revealed an immeasurable amount of truth that would later extend to all through the ministry and work of the apostles. For a few hours, the disciples were alone with their teacher; and the world was locked out.

One reason that these chapters (13-17) are precious to believers is that they highlight Jesus' love for His own (v.1). This touches on a truth emphasized throughout John's Gospel, which is the fact that **Jesus loved the whole world, but nothing can compare with His love for those who believed in Him.** This is Christ's all-saving love for those who are truly His sheep described by John earlier as those who "hear His voice, and He calls them by name and leads them out. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:3,5). Jesus made us His own by purchase, redeeming us from our sin through the blood of His cross. As the narrative unfolds, John makes a couple of significant comments that provide context for what Jesus did (2-4). First, he notes that "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Him" (v.2). This shows the satanic inspiration for Judas's betrayal. Judas was moved by Satan, whereas Jesus was moved by the loving will of God. The contrast between Christ's love and Judas's betrayal is stark. The pride of Judas is contrasted with Jesus' humility. **The contrast between the way of Satan and the way of Christ endures to this day.** If Jesus, with His soul filled with the consciousness of deity, took up the place of the most menial servanthood to wash His disciples' feet (including Judas's), then any authentic display of God must be characterized by humility, tenderness, and sacrificial love.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. How is the world's understanding of love different from the way Christ expects us to love others?
2. What is the biblical understanding of humility?
3. How are believers to display God's love to the world?

### **II. A Humble Heart | John 13:5-11**

We can only imagine what was going through the various disciples' minds as Jesus washed their feet. **On His last opportunity to teach the disciples about God's saving love, Jesus began not with words but action.** Before speaking about God's love, He showed it to them; taking up the place of a servant and washing their feet. The foot-washing took place according to established cultural practices. It was considered the duty of a host to provide a servant who would greet guests with a basin and wash towel. The roads at the time were not paved, and almost everyone wore sandals. Dinner was eaten at a low table, with the guests reclining on pillows with their feet extended outward; so, it was understandably important that people's feet be washed. By *having laid aside His outer garments and taking the towel*, Jesus was placing Himself in a lowly position, even for a Jewish slave, making Him the humble servant of those He loved. The disciples were shocked by seeing their master taking the place of a servant, and the most outspoken among the twelve was quick to speak, "He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?'" (v.6).

The idea of Christ washing his feet simply did not fit with Peter's way of thinking. Jesus' response alluded to the time after His death and resurrection, which fulfilled all that the foot-washing symbolized, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (v.7). Jesus' words to Peter form a good principle for us: that **there are things we may not understand now. But trust in Christ, believe His Word, accept His providence, and in the end, you will understand.** Peter was not yet ready to patiently await the unfolding of Christ's purpose. In verse 8, Jesus revealed to Peter that he could not enter the Kingdom of Heaven without having his sins washed away by Christ. Jesus now advances from the symbol of the foot-washing to the reality symbolized by it. **Jesus' act of servanthood was more than a mere demonstration of humility; it was a prelude to the greater humiliation of the cross.** If Peter was unwilling to allow Jesus the partial humiliation of washing his feet, how would he embrace the full and complete humiliation of Jesus on the cross the very next day? And unless Jesus cleanses us with the true washing of our sins with His shed blood, we cannot have any part of the salvation that He offers.

The first principle we must learn from this passage (5-11) is that our standing with God is never in jeopardy once Christ's atoning blood has cleansed us. The second principle is that we must return to Christ daily, confessing our sins to Him continuously, "Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean'" (v.10). **The postscript to the foot-washing impresses upon us the defining seriousness of the cleansing ministry of Christ.** At the end of verse 10 and in verse 11, Jesus said, "You are clean, but not every one of you. For He knows who was to betray Him" (10b-11). Judas received many benefits as Jesus' disciples. But in the pride of his heart, he never opened his heart for cleansing. In his love for money and worldly positions, he never sought a place in the family of God. Therefore, though Jesus washed his feet, the blood of the cross was never applied to the record of his sins. **How many people are like Judas today?** They enjoy the benefit of participating in the activities of the church. Their hearts are temporarily lightened by singing songs of praise or by listening to prayers. But their guilt is never washed away, and their souls are never renewed.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. Do you find it to be difficult to trust in God's providence when you don't fully understand what or why you are going through uncertainty in your life?
2. What makes it difficult to confess your sins to God regularly?
3. Practically, what can we learn from Judas's relationship with Jesus?

### **III. An Exemplary Heart | John 13:12-17**

Having washed His disciples' feet, Jesus asked them: "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (v.12). "The washing of the disciples' feet was intended by Jesus as an example of conduct, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (v.15). Having used the example of foot-washing to point to His atoning death, Jesus also employed it as a model for our sacrificial service in His name. **By washing the disciple's feet, Jesus was not establishing a new ritual or ordinance in which churches would playact at foot-washing regularly.** Rather, He intended to set forth a lifestyle that emulates the example set by his humble act of service. In the Kingdom of God, service is what elevates a person. **In God's eyes, nothing is worse than placing ourselves at the center of our spiritual universe.** Therefore, we should not consider ourselves above servant roles. Jesus concludes by saying, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (v.17). In God's Kingdom, not only must we know what to do, but we must also act on that knowledge. In our academic age, there is always a temptation or tendency to be satisfied with merely knowing about God, but **true disciples of Christ must act on what they know about Him.** How do we teach people to love others? By loving them.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. Is foot-washing required or expected to be practiced in the life of a local church?
2. Are there times when I felt entitled or deserving of something that resulted in a prideful display of uncharacteristic of my life in Christ?
3. Is there anything I know about God that I find difficult to put into practice?