



The Gospel of John

Session 28: The Last Supper and Jesus's Farewell Discourse

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

The apostle John's depiction of the Last Supper takes a distinct perspective from the other three Gospels. While they focused on the meal itself, and the symbolism of the bread and the cup, John highlighted Jesus's actions before the meal—washing the disciples' feet. Washing feet was the role of a servant, and the fact that their Rabbi took on such a lowly task must have shocked the disciples. Jesus set an example for them, and us, to follow. When we serve others, even our enemies, with humility and kindness, we demonstrate Christ's heart.

In this section, Jesus revealed His betrayer, Judas, and the events leading to Jesus's arrest began.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

John 13:1-30

THE MAIN IDEA

Jesus washed His disciples' feet and announced His betrayal.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

How does Jesus's example of foot washing model His love for His people? How should His example motivate our love toward God and others?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

John 13:1-11 John began his narrative of the last night Jesus spent with His disciples in this way: *"Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end."* His last act was not healing or a miracle, but service. The Savior of the world stooped down, taking the role of a servant, and washed the disciples' feet. Peter, initially offended that His Lord would serve him in this way, received it joyfully when Jesus said spiritual cleansing is how we receive life in Him.

John 13:12-20 Jesus explained the meaning of His actions. He said that His example of humble simple service is how we should each serve one another in love. Not only is service an act of Christian obedience, but Jesus said His followers would be blessed by serving. Finally, Jesus predicted that He would be betrayed that night, though He had not yet fully disclosed who His accuser was.

John 13:21-30 Jesus broke bread and handed it to Judas, the one who betrayed Him. Jesus served even His enemy. From that moment, Satan entered Judas and the plan for Jesus's arrest and crucifixion was underway.



START HERE

In 1866-1867, Alfred Nobel patented dynamite. By combining nitroglycerin with diatomaceous earth, this substance revolutionized mining by providing a safer way to handle explosives compared to straight nitroglycerin. The Swedish inventor soon learned that dynamite's application extended well beyond mining—it became an instrument of war.

In his will, Nobel directed a portion of his fortune to be used to establish a reward to those who worked for world peace and the good of humanity. The first recipient, Henry Dunant (1901), witnessed firsthand the atrocities of war. After seeing the devastation at the Battle of Solferino, he committed to serving wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were on. His efforts led to the establishment of the Red Cross and the development of the Geneva Conventions.

In John 13, Jesus did not wait for recognition. He quietly took a towel and served. The impact of Nobel's legacy gift and the humanitarian efforts of Henry Durant outlived them, and we see their impact in the world today. Jesus's act of humble obedience outlived the lives of the apostles, and set an example of humble, obedient service for all His followers.

DISCUSS

Why is service meant to be a normal part of following Christ?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. Because Jesus loves me, I can serve others, even those who hurt me.

John 13:1-11: *Before the Passover Festival, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

Now when it was time for supper, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon Iscariot's son, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God. So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus answered him, "What I'm doing you don't realize now, but afterward you will understand."

"You will never wash my feet," Peter said.

Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me."



Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head."

"One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." For he knew who would betray him. This is why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

Unpacking John 13:1-11

Mother Teresa (1910-1997), born in present-day North Macedonia, devoted her life to serving the poorest populations in Kolkata, India. After joining the Sisters of Loreto as a young woman, she felt a distinct calling to leave life in the convent and serve the poor on the streets of India. Her work often brought her into impoverished situations, serving people with debilitating and infectious diseases. In 1950, she founded the Missionaries of Charity, an organization committed to serving *"the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, and the lepers."*

When she received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she redirected the attention toward the work of her organization, insisting that her work was merely an expression of Christ's love. Mother Teresa once said, *"Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love."* Her enduring legacy is one of obedience, sacrifice, and humble service.

Jesus knew the Father had given everything into His hands, that He had come from God, and was soon to return to God. The text says that *"having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end"* (v. 1). Jesus's love endured, even in the face of His imminent arrest and crucifixion. It is impossible for us to know the immense pressure Jesus experienced that night, both internally and externally. However, on the night of His arrest, He prioritized loving His disciples and leaving them with a tangible reminder of His love. In addition, He gave them a command to love others in His name.

The devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. How or why Judas decided to betray Christ has been debated for centuries. Some believe that Judas was attempting to force Jesus's hand. By turning Him over to the Romans, some say, Jesus would have been compelled to prove Himself in a dramatic way, ushering in a kingdom where Jesus would overrule Roman occupation on behalf of the Jews. Others believe Judas perceived that Jesus would not be able to escape the mounting persecution facing Him. Perhaps Judas decided to escape the coming wrath while he could, making a profit in the process. Of course, that decision was far greater than a simple betrayal—Scripture says he gave himself over to evil (v. 27).

"Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God. So he got up from supper, laid aside his outer clothing, took a towel, and tied it around himself. Next, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around him" (vv. 2-5).

In the ancient world, walking was, by and large, the only mode of transportation. Traveling by dirty, dusty roads filled with mud and animal droppings was the norm, and people had only



simple leather sandals to protect their feet. When guests arrived in someone's home, a servant would take the lowly job of washing the visitors' feet as a sign of hospitality and practical service. That Jesus would take such a humble position must have shocked the disciples. Yet, Jesus demonstrated a completely different way to lead.

Jesus's humility came from His confidence in His relationship with the Father. Humble service to others flows from our relationship with God. Jesus took the lowly position of a servant because He knew His heavenly position. As believers, we can also serve others with humility because we know our eternal position with the Father. When we are secure in Christ, we no longer have anything to prove to someone else. We can love others freely, as an extension of the extravagant love we have received.

It's hard to imagine what the disciples experienced at that moment. The Messiah, the One they had prayed for, and the One they believed was the Savior of the Lord, stooped down and began to wash their soiled feet. The one who had just been anointed for burial with Mary's perfumed oil, and His feet dried with her hair, now bent low to wash them. It was both an act of practical service, and an expression of love.

Jesus's lowly posture confused the apostle, Peter. *"Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"* (v. 6). Perhaps Peter was looking for a servant to do the job, or maybe he was preparing himself to trade roles with Jesus. Instead, Jesus revealed the spiritual symbol of the task, *"What I'm doing you don't realize now, but afterward you will understand"* (v. 7). Jesus's actions were more than a random act of kindness. They foreshadowed the way in which Jesus' sacrifice would cleanse them from their sins.

The Old Testament has many references to spiritual cleansing. In Psalm 51, David prayed, *"Completely wash away my guilt and cleanse me from my sin . . . Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."* (Ps. 51:2,7) In 2 Kings 5, Naaman was sent to dip in the Jordan seven times so that he would be healed. And in Ezekiel 36:25-26, the prophet declared a day when God would cleanse them with spiritual water and give them a new heart and a new spirit. That day had arrived through Christ—His washing of the disciples' feet meant more than they could grasp in the moment. It was only after His death, burial, and resurrection, the ultimate cleansing from our sins, that the disciples fully understood what He had done for them that night.

Still, Peter was shocked that Jesus would take such a low position and protested the Lord's efforts: *"You will never wash my feet"* (v. 8a). Perhaps the tenderness of the moment was too much for Peter to take in. *"Jesus replied, 'If I don't wash you, you have no part with me'"* (v. 8b). There is no room for arrogance in God's kingdom. We all come to Christ as sinners in need of cleansing and forgiveness that we can't accomplish on our own. Only Jesus, who took the position of a servant, could make us clean. Peter responded, *"Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head"* (v. 9)



In his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*, Timothy Keller wrote, *"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe, yet more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope."* In that moment, Peter understood his own sinful nature and wanted Christ to cleanse him from head to toe! He was willing to submit himself to Jesus to be clean. It should not surprise us, then, that as a much older man, the apostle Peter would write, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you"* (1 Peter 5:6-7). Jesus humbled Himself to be obedient to death on the cross. In return, we joyfully and humbly submit to Christ in all things.

"One who has bathed," Jesus told him, "doesn't need to wash anything except his feet, but he is completely clean. You are clean, but not all of you." For he knew who would betray him. This is why he said, *"Not all of you are clean"* (vv. 10-11). When we have been washed by Christ's blood and made spiritually new, there is nothing left for us to do. We are declared pardoned and spiritually clean forever. As the New Testament writer Jude declared, *"Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen"* (Jude 24).

Notably, Jesus knew Judas would betray Him, and yet he washed his feet anyway. He knew *"not all of you are clean"* (John 13:11) Jesus's secure love and relationship with the Father allowed Him not only to serve all the disciples with humility but allowed Him to serve even His enemy. Jesus's willingness to wash Judas is good news for us. Like Judas, we all initially come to Jesus as enemies of God because of our sin (Isaiah 63:10). However, unlike Judas, we who have trusted Christ have become friends of God and have been set free from our sin.

Romans 5:8-11 says, *"But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation."* Christ loved us and gave Himself for us long before we ever loved Him. Now that we are no longer enemies of God, but beloved children and co-heirs with Christ, we are set free to serve others in humility and love. There is nothing left for God's people to do or for God's people to prove. Because Jesus loves us, we can serve others, even those who hurt us.

DISCUSS

- What did Jesus's actions reveal about His identity?
- Why was it significant that Jesus washed Judas's feet?
- Who is difficult for you to serve, and what would it look like to do so anyway?



2. Because Jesus set an example of service, I can serve others as an extension of His love.

John 13:12-20: *When Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothing, he reclined again and said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you."*

"Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

"I'm not speaking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the Scripture must be fulfilled: The one who eats my bread has raised his heel against me. I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he. Truly I tell you, whoever receives anyone I send receives me, and the one who receives me receives him who sent me."

Unpacking John 13:12-20

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) emerged as a central leader in the American civil rights movement, advocating for racial equality through nonviolent resistance. King issued a call for justice rooted in sacrificial love and service over retaliation.

His leadership came at great personal loss. Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested multiple times, and he and his family faced ongoing threats. King even gave his life in defense of his cause. Throughout it all, he maintained his commitment to nonviolent protest.

When he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he was the youngest recipient at the time. In his speech, he framed the award as a recognition not of a person, but of a movement committed to love, justice, and human dignity. He famously said:

*"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve.
You don't have to have a college degree to serve.
You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.
You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.
You don't have to know Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" to serve.
You don't have to know the Second Theory of Thermal Dynamics in Physics to serve.
You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love, and you can be that servant."*

After washing their feet, Jesus asked the disciples if they understood what He had done for them. *"You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are speaking rightly, since that is what I am"* (v. 13). As Teacher and Lord, Jesus both demonstrated and instructed what His followers were to do.



“So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done for you” (vv. 14-15). These men (except for Judas who, after his death, would be replaced with Matthias) would lead the New Testament church. They would become teachers who pointed people to Christ as Lord. Their roles would not be easy. The disciples were flogged, arrested, and killed for the cause of Christ. However, Jesus established that their authority would rest not on title or position, but on service.

“Truly I tell you, a servant is not greater than his master, and a messenger is not greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (vv. 16-17). The disciples frequently worried about who would be first, and who would sit at Jesus's right and left (Mark 10:37). They offered to call down fire from heaven to devour Jesus's enemies (Luke 9:54), and they tried to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus's name (Luke 9:49). At this Last Supper, Jesus not only modeled a different kind of leadership, He also expected them to follow His example.

Mark 10:43b-45 says, *“ . . . whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* Jesus redefined greatness. It is not found in status or authority, but in humble obedience. He taught them that blessing came not from knowing the truth alone, but from living it out.

“I'm not speaking about all of you; I know those I have chosen. But the Scripture must be fulfilled: The one who eats my bread has raised his heel against me. I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am he. Truly I tell you, whoever receives anyone I send receives me, and the one who receives me receives him who sent me” (John 13:18-20). Jesus knew He would be betrayed. Lines were drawn, and Judas had chosen the side of the Pharisees; the other disciples had to choose also. The time for wavering had passed.

DISCUSS

- *What command did Jesus give His disciples?*
- *Why is serving others often difficult in practice?*
- *Where is God calling you to serve quietly and consistently?*



3. Because of Jesus' faithfulness, I can remain faithful to love and obedience.

John 13:21-30: *When Jesus had said this, he was troubled in his spirit and testified, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."*

The disciples started looking at one another—uncertain which one he was speaking about. One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus. Simon Peter motioned to him to find out who it was he was talking about. So he leaned back against Jesus and asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus replied, "He's the one I give the piece of bread to after I have dipped it." When he had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son. After Judas ate the piece of bread, Satan entered him. So Jesus told him, "What you're doing, do quickly."

None of those reclining at the table knew why he said this to him. Since Judas kept the money-bag, some thought that Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival," or that he should give something to the poor. After receiving the piece of bread, he immediately left. And it was night.

Unpacking John 13:21-30

Malala Yousafzai became a global advocate for girls' education after speaking against Taliban restrictions in Pakistan. As a young teen, she wrote and spoke publicly about the importance of education for girls.

Tragically, in 2012, she was targeted and shot by extremists. She survived the shooting and continued her work to an even larger global platform. In 2014, she became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate. When her circumstances could have caused her retreat in fear and shame, her tenacity became a beacon of hope and optimism, and she continued her fight for women's education.

Violence and betrayal are terrible consequences of the Fall, and Jesus felt their impact, even as He prepared to pay the ultimate price for sin. Jesus became troubled and revealed that one of His disciples would betray Him. It's hard to imagine the kind of shock and pain Jesus must have felt to know that one of His twelve closest friends and disciples would turn Him over to soldiers and the religious leaders in just a few short hours.

"The disciples started looking at one another—uncertain which one he was speaking about" (v. 22). Not knowing what we do now, hearing Jesus say definitively that He would be betrayed, and by one of their own no less, must have been horrifying and confusing for the disciples.

"One of his disciples, the one Jesus loved, was reclining close beside Jesus. Simon Peter motioned to him to find out who it was he was talking about. So he leaned back against Jesus



and asked him, "Lord, who is it?" (vv. 23-25). In a first century dinner, guests reclined at low tables, often propping up on their left elbow while eating with their right hand. In this text, John self-identified as "*the one Jesus loved*," a designation he used five times in his Gospel. Reclining at Jesus's right side, he could have easily leaned against the Lord to ask Him to identify His betrayer. It's also noteworthy that when the disciples heard that Jesus would be betrayed, they didn't immediately suspect Judas over the other disciples. The way in which Judas had interacted with the disciples apparently did not lead them to question his loyalty or integrity.

In an ancient meal, the "*choice morsel*" was a portion of honor. "*When he had dipped the bread, he gave it to Judas, Simon Iscariot's son*" (v. 26b). Jesus gave the best serving to His enemy. If Judas ever had an opportunity to stop and do the right thing, this was it. However, the text says Judas took the piece of bread, and Satan entered him. Jesus, knowing that Judas's decision to betray Him was certain, responded, "*What you're doing, do quickly*" (v. 27).

But the other disciples still did not assume Judas was the betrayer. They thought, because he kept the money bag, that Jesus sent him to buy provisions for the festival. You might recall Judas served as treasurer for the disciples. When Mary anointed Jesus's feet with expensive perfume, Judas protested, saying the money could have gone to the poor. But John said, "*He didn't say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He oversaw the money-bag and would steal part of what was put in it.*" (John 12:6)

Action reveals character. Judas's actions revealed his character, just as Jesus's actions revealed His own. Jesus knew Judas would betray Him and yet He washed His feet anyway. He sat with Judas at the table. He offered him food from His hand. He gave him an opportunity to rethink his choice. At this last meal, Jesus lived out His command, "*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matthew 5:44).

Verse 30 says, "*After receiving the piece of bread, he immediately left. And it was night.*" Judas Iscariot, filled with Satan, made his decision, just as Jesus made Him. In John 10:18, Christ spoke of giving up His life: "*No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*" (John 10:18). Night fell, and the Light of the world prepared to plunge into the darkness of death and grave to rescue His people.

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus reveal His betrayer?*
- *What did Jesus's response to Judas reveal about His character?*
- *How can you remain faithful even when others are not?*



DEEPER FOCUS

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *How did Jesus's service in foot washing point to the cross?*
- *How does your identity in Christ shape your willingness to serve?*
- *Where are you tempted to seek recognition instead of simply serving?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

- When you serve someone who doesn't "deserve" it, who do you think is impacted more—they, or you? Why?

APPLY

How can Jesus's action towards Judas encourage you to love a difficult person in your life?
Who in your life needs quiet, sacrificial love this week?

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