



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 20, 2008  
Released on Wednesday, July 16, 2008**

**“Christ as (Exemplary) Servant”**

**Lesson Text: John 13:1–8, 12–20.**

**Devotional Reading: Isaiah 53:4–6.**

**Background Scripture: John 13:1–20.**

**Read: John 13:1–20.**

**Place: Jerusalem**

**Time: about A.D. 30**

**John 13:1-20**

1Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

3Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

4He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

5After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

6Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

7Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

8Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

9Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

### **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to examine the passage in John's Gospel that records how Jesus washed the disciples' feet.

**Principle:** to teach the importance of humble service to those who would follow Christ.

**Application:** to challenge Christians to follow the example of their Lord as He humbled Himself to serve others.

### **INTRODUCTION**

When we eat at a restaurant, we wait for our food to be delivered to our table. The server will usually stop by during our meal to see whether the food is to our liking. If we have a problem, the server will try to correct it. We watch servers carrying heavy trays of plates and comment that they have a hard job.

But servers in restaurants do get paid, and if they work well, they get generous tips. They work their shift, go home, and enjoy the amenities that most other persons in society possess. How different was the status of those who served in Jesus' day! Although there were varying levels of servants and slaves in the Roman Empire and their treatment varied accordingly, they were always a distinct class that was expected to serve.

Jesus' disciples were aware of these distinctions. Even in their informal group of twelve, they strove to establish themselves in positions in which they could be served, not serve others (Mark 9:33). Jesus periodically had to confront them about

this attitude, and as they gathered for their last meal together, He confronted them again—this time by personal example.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The Passover was one of the great pilgrimage festivals of Jewish ancient times. Its observance recalled God's first deliverance of (what would become) the nation of Israel from slavery (Exodus 12). By Jesus' day, several symbols were used to commemorate the original deliverance: bitter herbs, unleavened bread, etc. Unlike the other Gospel accounts of Jesus' last supper, John's doesn't elaborate on any of these symbols (compare Matthew 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23). However, by mentioning the Feast of the Passover, John probably seeks to evoke the symbolic meaning of the total Passover event itself in the light of Christ.

Jesus took two of these symbols—unleavened bread and fruit of the vine—in instituting the Lord's Supper. But that is not the subject of today's lesson. Instead, we will focus on an additional imagery that Christ created on that fateful night: an imagery of service.

## **QUESTIONS**

### **THE SETTING FOR CHRIST'S SERVICE—John 13:1–3.**

#### **1. How would you describe Jesus' love for His disciples? (John 13:1)**

Jesus' earthly ministry was reaching its climax. Throughout John's Gospel He had repeatedly said that His "hour" had not yet come (cf. 2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:20). But now, with this Passover Feast, it had finally arrived (13:1; cf. 12:23; 17:1). It was the "hour" in which Jesus would die, rise again, and depart from the earth to enjoy again His heavenly glory.

As His departure loomed, He continued to love His disciples. These were the Twelve, who still lived in the world of unbelieving humanity but had been spiritually removed from its grasp (cf. John 17:15–16). His love for them was both unceasing and unreserved. "Unto the end" (13:1) can mean that He loved them until He died, but it also implies that He did so to the utmost extent. They were not easy to love, but Jesus looked beyond their flaws and gave Himself to them fully.

#### **2. What are some likely reasons that Judas betrayed Jesus? (John 13:2)**

While Jesus loved His own, hatred motivated Judas to betray Him. "Supper being ended" is properly translated "during supper," since it was still in progress when Judas left (v. 26). The betrayer was Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

Judas's personal motives for betraying Jesus are probably complex. We know he was greedy and dishonest (Matt. 26:14–15; John 12:4–6), but there may have been more. His surname indicates that he was a man of Kerioth, located in Judea, where nationalism was strong. Expecting Jesus to overthrow Roman rule, he was disappointed. He turned against Him and, wanting to salvage material gain from the relationship, sold his services to Jesus' enemies.

#### **3. How was Satan involved in Jesus' death? How did he turn out to deceive himself in this?**

John 13:2 indicates that more was at work than Judas's corrupt nature. It was "the devil" who was behind this vile deed. He had put it in Judas's heart. Satan, the arch-deceiver, had deceived himself into thinking that Jesus' death would mean the

end of Jesus' kingdom (cf. v. 27). Ironically, His death was the basis for His triumph over all the forces of evil (John 13:31–33; Col. 2:13–15).

Jesus was aware of this outcome. He knew that "the Father had given all things into his hands" (John 13:3). In addition, He knew that He would enter the dark hours ahead, since even the cross was under God's control. He is confidently awaiting glorification. It is with this full awareness that He now undertakes to wash His disciples' feet.

#### **THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S SERVICE—John 13:4–8.**

##### **4. Why were guests' feet usually washed? Who usually did this?**

In the Mediterranean world of the time, people wear open sandals as they walk along dusty streets. *Feet* thus get dirty quickly. For people to *wash* their own feet is a common practice. Cultural hospitality includes providing water (and sometimes servants) for guests to get their feet clean. This is typical and even somewhat expected (see Luke 7:44). The lowest household servant normally washed the guests' feet.

##### **5. Why had the disciples not washed each other's feet? (John 13:4–5)**

In this case no servant was present, and none of the disciples would humble themselves to serve the rest. In fact, their frame of mind was just the opposite. As mentioned earlier, they even argued among themselves about who should be the greatest (Luke 22:24). Jesus had to admonish them about the proper attitude subjects of His kingdom should have toward one another (vs. 25–27).

But this time He fortified His admonition with an important lesson: By removing His outer garment and tying *a towel* around himself, Jesus categorizes himself as a servant toward each of them—even the one who would betray Him. The disciples probably, if reminded, would gladly have washed Jesus' feet. But it was unheard of that a superior should ever wash the feet of a subordinate (see Carlson, *The gospel According to John*, InterVarsity).

##### **6. In what ways can Christians take the initiative in providing humble service to others?**

It's not unusual to hear the response, "That's not my job!" when someone is asked to provide an act of service. (A similar response that's dressed in religious clothes is, "That's not my area of spiritual giftedness.") Some may say, "Let the government take care of the people who can't pay their bills. That's why I pay my taxes." Yet our Lord calls upon us to be responsive to the cries of those in need (Matthew 25:35–46).

Taking initiative means not waiting to be asked to help. Keeping our eyes open to needs around us and then doing what we can to meet those needs is necessary. A mistake we make when we see someone going through a crisis is to say, "If there is anything I can do, just let me know." Instead, we can open our eyes and see things that can be done—mowing the yard, providing a meal, caring for the children, etc.—then just dive in and do it.

##### **7. Why did Peter object to Jesus' washing his feet? (John 13:6–7)**

The disciples' shock and revulsion soon became evident. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter asked Him, "Lord, dost thou wash my feet?" In the Greek the two pronouns are emphasized: "Lord, are *you* going to wash *my* feet?" Peter was well intentioned, but he spoke hastily and without discernment.

Jesus informed Peter that this act was something he would come to understand only later (v. 7). This act of humble service serves as a precursor to Jesus' death on the cross as His ultimate service to humankind. We may pause to note that this is not the first time that people fail to grasp the significance of Jesus' words, nor will it be the last (John 7:37; 12:16; 20:9). For now, though, Peter needed to accept by faith the importance of Jesus' act.

#### **8. What statement of Jesus induced Peter to drop his objection and allow Jesus to wash his feet? (John 13:8)**

Peter, who would not be put off by the promise of more complete understanding in the future, categorically refused to have Jesus wash his feet. He could only think of how socially improper it was. He declared, "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (v. 8). He was humble enough to realize that his Lord should not be serving him, but proud enough to tell Him what He could not do!

Jesus' response was just as categorical: If He did not wash him, Peter would have no participation with Him. This was really true; if Jesus did not wash Peter's feet, Peter could not partake of the meal with Him. But it also conveyed spiritual truth. If a person does not allow Jesus to cleanse him from sin, he can have no relationship with Him. In addition, someone who refuses this act of service from Jesus is rejecting His Person because he shows no comprehension of what He is like.

Peter responded instantly with an about-face. He now wanted Him to wash not just his feet but his whole body! (v. 9) Jesus explained that, spiritually, this was unnecessary, for those who were His by faith had already been thoroughly cleansed (v. 10). They now needed only to deal with individual shortcomings. But, sadly, one among them was not clean at all.

#### **THE MEANING IN CHRIST'S SERVICE—John 13:12–20.**

#### **9. What lessons did Jesus want His example to teach His disciples? (John 13:12-17)**

It appears that Jesus was teaching more than one lesson by washing His disciples' feet. We have already seen, through His conversation with Peter, that it signified a daily cleansing from sin—a cleansing without which continuing fellowship is impossible.

But He had another lesson in mind that is revealed in the verses that follow. Having washed the feet of all, Jesus clothed Himself again and took His place at the table. He then questioned them on their comprehension of what had just happened. It is obvious that the disciples had not understood. They were all appalled that their Lord had done it, but now they needed to think.

Jesus told His disciples the implications of calling Him Teacher and Lord: they ought to follow the example He had set. He had temporarily relinquished His deserved honor, taken the role of a servant, and washed their feet.

Jesus argued that if He, as Lord and Teacher, had washed His disciples' feet, they ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:14). True discipleship has to understand God's words, but the disciple hasn't fully learned from Christ until the understanding translates into action (see v.17). A disciple not only *hears* the Word of God, he or she *does* the things of God (see also Matthew 7:24). Note the importance of keeping the Word in John 8:51; 14:23; 17:6.

#### **10. Why was Jesus' prophecy of His betrayal a means of strengthening faith? (John 13:18–19)**

Jesus, sadly, had to tell the disciples that His instructions did not apply to all of them, for one would turn against Him. The betrayal would fulfill the scriptural prophecy. *Fulfilled* prophecies are proof of God's sovereignty (Ezekiel 24:20–24). The

reference here is to Psalm 41:9, which speaks of betrayal by friends. The tragedy of the betrayal is that it is by one who has eaten *bread with* Jesus. Sharing a meal is an activity of friends, not enemies.

Jesus' knowledge of the future should help His disciples to continue to *believe* in Him through this trying time (see John 14:29). Telling the disciples of the forthcoming betrayal proves that the consequent arrest, trial, and crucifixion is not an unexpected development that thwarts the Messiah's intention. Rather, in the providence of God the betrayal will help bring His intentions *to pass*. The disciples need to know that God is still in control throughout the forthcoming events.

"I am he" is a clear allusion to Christ's deity here as it is in John 8:24, 28, 58 (compare Exodus 3:14; Isaiah 43:10).

### **11. How are Jesus' messengers enabled to share in His ministry? (John 13:20)**

Jesus' statement reflects the closeness between God's will and that of Jesus that has already been stated more fully in John 5:19–30 (compare Matthew 10:40). This verse establishes the disciples' forthcoming ministry after Jesus' death. As such, it anticipates their commission in John 20:21. Jesus has the authority of the Father.

Jesus would send them, and whoever received them favorably would be receiving Him as well. We too have been called to serve one another as Jesus did. But with this comes the privilege of continuing His revelation of His Father in the world. As we do this, this eternal God is pleased to exalt us, His servants, to partnership with Him.

### **CONCLUSION**

Why don't more Christians take up humble service? Is it the work involved? Work can be hard, but we go to work for pay every day. Is it time constraints? We all seem to find time for many other things. Is our time just too "valuable"? Jesus' time was overwhelmed with his ministry (Matthew 4:23–25; John 6:24; 8:2). But he found time to do even a servant's job. Should we do any less?

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

1. Jesus' love for us is constant, even when our love for Him falters (John 13:1–2).
2. God-given privileges do not exempt us from humble service, but obligate us to it (vs. 3–5).
3. To presume to know better than God is to set yourself apart from Him (vs. 6–8).
4. Christlike leadership does not promote ourselves; it honors others (vs. 12–15).
5. Serving others out of love for Christ brings joy, not drudgery (vs. 16–17).
6. Knowing Jesus knows us and has chosen us will comfort us when others let us down (vs. 18–20).

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Blessed are those whose love results in service.

### **PRAYER**

God, help us to learn to love others and to demonstrate that love in humble service, unconstrained by pride. In the name of our Savior Jesus, amen.

**ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON**

Next week's lesson comes from Matthew 16:13—23. It concludes our unit from the Gospels as we view Christ as Messiah.

July 27<sup>th</sup>'s lesson is titled, "Christ as Messiah." The printed text is Matthew 16:13—23. You should read Matthew 16:13—28 in preparation for this lesson. *Good studying!*

**LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

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