

“Jesus the Servant Lord”

John 13:1-38

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A belated Happy New Year! Here in Chapter 13, the setting is just before the Passover, and we’re at the last supper. It’s the night that Jesus would be betrayed, and He would commence down the path to the cross. We’re going to learn more about Jesus as He:

- Washes the disciples’ feet
- Predicts His betrayal and betrayer
- Predicts Peter’s denial

Verse 1 says, “*It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*” The last sentence of verse 1, “*Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end,*” should be every person’s goal for a legacy to leave in his/her life. Some might say they want to leave behind money for their children to be more comfortable. Some might say they want to make sure their achievements during their lives are celebrated, honored, and remembered for future generations. Yet, we were created in the image of a God who is love, so being loving creations should be what one of, if not our greatest, life objective. Jesus confirmed this in Matthew 22:37-39 when He told us to love God with all our hearts, souls, strengths, and minds and to love others as we love ourselves.

John sets the scene for the rest of the chapter in verses 2 & 3 in an interesting manner, and I think in an important sequential order. He first points out that the devil had already prompted, or tempted, Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. The key word in this verse is “prompted.” I like this translation better than the KJV which uses the words “put into the heart.” There are two Greek words that make up this interpretation, and they mean “throw forth.”

The devil did not force Judas to betray Jesus, and he doesn’t force us to sin either. I think many of you might remember the comedian, Flip Wilson. He played a character named Geraldine, and her famous line was, “*The devil made me do it.*” Funny, yes, but true, no. Satan and his evil minions know our weaknesses, and they will prey on them with temptations or “throw forth” situations or people at us with agendas for us to disobey God - or, more bluntly, sin. However, they can’t make us do anything. If we sin, it is 100% on us to make that choice.

Today’s world is trying to eliminate accountability – or distance consequences from our acts of free will, but that is a lie. Moreover, each of us has the greater power of the Holy Spirit indwelling in us to turn to for help when we’re under attack or being tempted by the devil. Remember, He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Therefore, when we sin, and we all do and will, we have no one to blame but ourselves because we made the choice to do so.

Some of you might be saying, “Geez, Dan, aren’t we a bit judgy today?” If I didn’t continue these thoughts, then I once again would be channeling another one of Flip Wilson’s characters – the Judge - chanting, “*Here comes the judge. Here comes the judge.*” Praise God, we are living in an age of grace. Upon our confession of Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are forgiven of every past, present, and future sin. Yes, we’re going to sin from time-to-time in moments of weakness. However, Jesus gave us a bottomless savings account of grace to pay the fine of every one of those future sins.

This is why I believe verse 3 follows verse 2 as opposed to the other way around. Verse two tells us the devil may be at work, but verse 3 gloriously proclaims, “*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God;*” In other words, God the Son

is in control, brothers and sisters. Satan may occasionally win a few battles, but Jesus won the war at His cross and resurrection. Amen?

Beginning in verses 4 & 5 and after dinner, where most of us might want to relax, Jesus prepares to wash the people's feet. This scene has significant spiritual components to it. First, water speaks of the Word. Jesus said in John 15:3, "*You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.*" The Apostle Paul told us we are washed by the water of the Word in Ephesians 5:26.

Secondly, the washing of the people's feet was typically performed by a slave. With this in mind, now try to picture or imagine the thoughts of His disciples as Jesus starts to do this. They must have been stunned. He was laying the foundation for Biblical leadership – I'll speak more on this in a bit.

Third, we read in verse 12 that He finished the job – He washed everyone's feet. Did you read of any exceptions to His willingness to wash their feet? God wants us *all* to be clean. Isaiah 1:16 says, "*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.*" The Bible tells us that while we are charged to repent from our sin, to be forgiven of our sin requires the shedding of blood. 1 John 1:7 promises that Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin. For those of us who get caught up in the judgment of other's sins, we must never forget that we, too, were objects of God's wrath as unforgiven sinners. His grace saved us, so we must repent from our fleshly-driven judgment and extend our God-given grace to those He brings into our lives.

In verses 6-8, we're given an exchange between Jesus and Peter where Peter can't handle the idea of His Lord washing his feet. This sacrificial service mindset is the lesson He is trying to get through to Peter. When I first became a Christian, I struggled with Peter's character. He came across as bold, impetuous, and prideful. As I have aged, I've come to have a deep love for this man and can relate to him. Way more often than I'd like to admit, I have had to repent of my pride and getting out ahead of the Lord. More importantly, I see the Lord's attitude towards Peter as unwavering love, patience, and devotion. This gives me hope that Jesus will extend the same patient lovingkindness towards me when I'm acting like Peter – or worse.

"No, you shall never wash my feet." "I will never be made to stumble." These are the quotes of prideful Peter. Of the countless lessons I've learned from my wife, Vickie, over our 35-plus years of marriage, the one word I no longer use is "never." Never is a prideful word. '*I'll never do this,*' or '*I'll never act like that.*' I can just see the devil with an evil smirk on his face when hearing these "*never*" proclamations saying, "*We'll see about that.*" In my life when the circumstances are the hardest – when a trial is at its most painful, I find the real test of my character and faith. In the depth of despair or the pressure of the moment, I've done and said things that, to this day, I cannot believe I said or did. Be careful, loved ones, with your "*never*" statements. However, please don't take this caution as a discouragement of a conviction to live a more holy life – that's a good and Biblical thing. Just regularly preface such "*never*" comments with "by the grace of God go before I."

In verses 15 & 16, Jesus provided a blueprint for Biblical leadership. He said, "*I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.*" A true leader leads by example. He or she will never ask someone to do something that they're not prepared to first do himself/herself. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus finished washing *all* of their feet. In the washing of the people's feet, He could have done just a few of the people's feet to make a point. If you think about it, though, that would have cheapened His message. I've found it helpful as I read the Scriptures to try to imagine myself in Biblical stories. If I were there when Jesus started washing His feet, the power behind what He was doing would have been lessened had He had just washed a few people's feet. Imagine what it would have meant to you for Jesus Christ to wash *your* feet?

One of the distinguishing and most powerful proofs of the validity of Scripture are fulfilled prophecies. God is eternal, and because He is eternal, He is also omnipresent. This means He is present throughout all of time. This gives Him the ability to say today that something is going to happen 100 years from now with absolute certainty. Only God can do this. Psalm 41:9, which says, *“Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* You could replace “has lifted up his heel against me” with “acted as a traitor.” This Psalm was believed to be written around 1015 B.C. It was a prophecy written some 1,045 years prior to this moment in Christ’s life with stunning accuracy as evidenced by Jesus referencing it in verse 18. The Lord said in verse 19, *“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.”* He was clearly stating that His ability to speak of future events was one of the ways people would believe who He was.

In verse 21, Jesus was troubled in the spirit and testified, *“Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”* Because Jesus was and is holy – without sin, He was acutely aware of evil activity in the spirit world. He made what was I’m sure a shocking claim to His beloved disciples about one of them – he was going to betray Him. We need to keep in mind that these 12 men had been side-by-side with each other and with Jesus for three consecutive years. You spend that much time with people, you’re going to believe you know them pretty well. Therefore, this claim that one of them was going to betray him really floored them. Notably, in Matthew’s accounting of this scene in chapter 26:22, they each started question themselves and ask Jesus if they were the one. This is what sin does. It casts doubt, fear, and condemnation on people who aren’t even sinning at that time. This is a great example of while I’m certain the best part about being in heaven will be being with Jesus, the thought of no longer being affected by Satan and sin is another huge perk.

In verse 26, the Lord reveals His betrayer by saying, *“It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.”* I have no doubt that Jesus was looking straight into Judas’ eyes, when He told him that whom He gives the bread dipped in the dish is the one. My guess is this was said quietly just to Judas as when he did take the bread. Then Jesus likely said out loud to do what he was about to do to do it quickly. The rest of the disciples heard these words but did not understand. Even though Judas had suddenly left, they still didn’t get what was going on.

Verse 27 notes that as soon as Judas took the bread from Jesus, Satan entered him. I believe up until the point of Judas took the bread from the Lord, He still had a chance to be saved. The key thing to remember is, in this moment, He had a choice. Such as it is for each of us. God’s love *for* us and invitation *to* us is never forced *upon* us. Without the gift of free will or freedom to choose, the depth and potential of love is severely restricted. God could have been done with humanity after Adam’s sin, but He chose grace, mercy, and forgiveness instead of judgment. The Apostle John made it clear in his first epistle that God is love. The testimony to this foundational character trait is only a God who is love, will choose grace, mercy, and forgiveness time-and-time again as opposed to judgment. The most powerful and vivid display of the passionate love God has for every member of His creation is Christ crucified. Again, Jesus had a choice to obey the Father’s will. He chose the Father’s love over human judgment.

God made the first choice – He’s made His intentions towards each of us abundantly clear. But, as with any relationship, it takes two to tango - it is still up to each of us to make our choice. Most, if not all, of you listening to this have made that decision. However, if there are any of you who have not, I invite you to take some time and get to know the love that God has for you. This is, for me and the rest of the lecturers, why we teach. It is also People of the Word’s mission statement – finding the truth of God through the study of His Word. Our hope is that you are learning the character of God to be faithful, honest, determined, powerful, merciful, loving and so much more so as to reveal something inside of you is yearning for. This is your soul that is lost *without* Him, but secure, safe, and treasured *with* Him.

God's patience and grace is far greater than any of us could muster, but it does have an expiration date. While it is possible the door was still open to Judas repenting when Jesus called him "friend" in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas' expiration date was likely when he took the bread from the Lord. I believe his eternal fate was likely settled in this moment. There was no coming back. I can assure you the Godhead took no joy in this potential "cross-the-line" moment for Judas. He takes no joy in the death of the wicked. Just as Judas had his final chance, so does every other human being.

You might be wondering when exactly does that happen? That answer is solely God's to provide. This is why, unless we get a direct communique from the Lord that says otherwise, we should never give up on anyone. We should never stop our efforts to love on and pray for those God brings into our lives. I can completely understand how difficult this can be as some people can be extremely challenging to deal with. While I don't hold any of you in judgment if you do pull back in your efforts to love and care for others for whatever reason, you still should be able to pray for these people.

One last point on this section of our reading where it says, "Satan entered him." Please take comfort, if you have confessed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, Satan cannot enter you. Why? Because you have within you the far great power and presence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit whom you received upon your confession. While Satan can certainly harass, annoy, and cause pain and suffering, He cannot enter you. Imagine a glass of water – if you fill it to the brim, there's no more room for any more water. The believer in and follower of Jesus is filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit. Can I get an amen?

J. Vernon McGee, in his commentary, pointed out that the Lord Jesus gave four major discourses. A discourse is an extended teaching on a specific topic or series of topics. There is a clear agenda to everyone of Jesus' discourses. These four discourses were:

1. Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
2. The Mystery of the Parables (Matthew 13)
3. The Kingdom of Heaven; Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25)
4. The Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

The first three were public – they were intended to be heard by all who were willing to hear. Conversely, the Upper Room is reserved for His own. He sees the cross rapidly approaching Him. His public ministry has drawn to a close, so now He is going to speak to His own. With Judas now gone, this is a personal message to those who had kept their faith in Him. That should be exciting for us because as believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, this personal discourse isn't just for the disciples, it is for us as well. If McGee is correct regarding this being Jesus' fourth and final discourse, then I believe the order of the discourse is extremely important. McGee outlined the order of the Lord's objectives of this discourse by declaring:

- His love for us
- How we are to live the Christian life
- His provision for us
- The relationship between Him and His own

The Westminster Catechism was put together in 1646 and 1647 by English and Scottish theologians. It was designed to be the foundation of teaching the Christian faith to existing and new believers. Its structure is in a question-and-answer format. The first half of the very first question asked was, "*What is the chief end of man?*" The answer was, "*Man's chief end is to glorify God.*" The biblical references for this first priority of the Christian faith are:

- 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
- Romans 11:36: “For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things, to whom *be* glory forever. Amen.

As the opening to this personal teaching to us in verses 31 and 32, the very first thing Jesus speaks to and declares is the glorification of God. If we are to agree to McGee’s outline and the first point of the teaching focusing on God’s love for us, then we must conclude that the glorification of God is a primary component of His love for us.

For the non-believer and even some believers, the notion that the primary goal in life – our primary purpose for our existence is to give glory to God, I can see how some might conclude such a primary purpose is a little self-serving. Well, first, God is God, and He is sovereign. He can do whatever He wants. If we conclude that the core components of the foundation of God’s character are love, holiness, and goodness, then we can have confidence that there is a loving, holy, and good reason for glorifying Him as our life’s primary purpose.

Have you ever asked or thought of what the glorifying of God means? Try to envision a large canopy or umbrella. These are types of shelters protecting from potentially harmful elements outside the shelter. Within the shelter are the protected blessings intended for those being sheltered. These protected blessings are the entirety of God’s expressions of His love for those who believe in and follow Him – for whom He has covenanted to protect. Now, label that canopy or umbrella “God’s glory.” As I envision this image, then I’ve concluded that the glorification of God is simply giving Him thanks for His glory shelter and abundant provision. In other words, our lifelong primary purpose of living is giving God the glory as an expression of our gratitude for all the undeserved and unwarranted blessings He pours out on us each and every day.

We conclude this chapter with a brief but powerful exchange between Jesus and His beloved disciple, Peter. He asks the Lord where He is going. Jesus’ response was, “*Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.*” I ask you to consider seeing the entirety of the Gospel in this one sentence. First, where was Jesus going? He was going to the cross. Why was He going to the cross? To pay the price for every believer’s past, present, and future sin. Secondly, why could Peter not follow now? Because only Jesus could go to the cross. He was the pure, spotless, Lamb of God fulfilling the foreshadowing of blood atonement displayed through animal sacrifice in the Old Testament. If there’s going to be reconciliation, someone has to die.

Thirdly, notice the certainty of Jesus’ final component of verse 36, “but you *will* follow later.” He didn’t say you *might* follow later, or you *could* follow later. The word “will” is an assuring and confident word. Jesus, being God, was and is omniscient – He knows all things. He knows that despite Peter’s upcoming denial of Him will not be the end of him. By the grace of God, there would be more to his story after his failure. Where would Peter follow Jesus later? Ultimately, he would be reunited with Jesus in heaven. Church history tells us Peter also died on a cross, but upside down because he believed he wasn’t worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

If you’ve been too prideful in your faith like Peter was with his assurance he would lay down his life for Jesus, but eventually failed, don’t let Satan condemn you into a mindset of being abandoned by Jesus. In Luke’s version of this story, after Peter’s third denial of Jesus and the cock crowing as the Lord prophesied, Jesus looked at Peter. Have you ever thought about what look was on Jesus’ face? Satan and legalistic Christians would tell you it was a look of condemnation and disgust. At a minimum, they might say, it would have been a face of, “I told you so.” The God I have come to know in reading the entirety of His word tells me that was *not* the look that was on Jesus’ face. I believe it was a loving, understanding,

and sympathetic look as if Jesus was nonverbally telling Peter, “*It’s ok Peter, I still love you – this is not the end of our relationship.*” This is the spirit of Jesus’ promise to Peter, “*Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.*” Praise God, this same promise that is offered to every human God has created. That includes each of us.

I know most, if not all, of you believe this. However, as I conclude this lecture, I’m going to press in a bit and ask you if you *really* believe this? If you do, your life should reflect that promise – regardless of your circumstances. What should a life look like that has a deep trust and confidence *in* Jesus’ promise to Peter? Freedom from fear. Forgiveness of all offenses. Loving the unlovable. Extending grace to those who don’t deserve it. Showing mercy to the unmerciful. Please know I’m not attempting to diminish or discount the pain and suffering each of you might be experiencing. I’m well acquainted with the challenges that come with these mountainous hurdles to living a victorious life. But God can’t and doesn’t lie. 2 Corinthians 1:20 proclaims, “*For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*”

I spent some time earlier talking about glorifying God – living life with an attitude of constantly thanking Him for his abundant provision. His greatest provision is the promise to each believer His merciful, graceful, devoted, and forgiving love. The long and powerful arms of the Lord have picked up each of us time and time again. He will continue to do that, even though it may not feel like it at the moment, until He finally picks us up for the last time. We will then follow Him to where He went. To be with Him, the Father, the Holy Spirit, the angels, and all the saints that have gone before us to heaven. I’ll ask again, do you believe this? If so, let’s sing.