

John 13:1-38 “Becoming Good to Great”

Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor
Michael Gunn on July 22nd, 2007

“Those leaders who seek and thrive in the spotlight do not exude what can be termed ‘Level 5 Leadership’ behaviors...Leaders of this type; those who combine extreme personal humility with intense professional will; shun the attention of celebrity, channeling their ambition toward the goal of building a great company.”
Jim Collins; “Good to Great”

“We love because He first loved us”
1 John 4:19

Intro

“Before the Passover feast” has been misleading, since some here find a contradiction in regards to the synoptics (**Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:13-15**) timing, which indicates that the “Last Supper” happened on the Passover, and not “Before” it. However it is not necessary to jump to this kind of conclusion for at least 2 reasons. First “Before” can indicate right before, and the emphasis here is on the foot washings that will transpire before the meal. Secondly, and I think more definitively, is the fact that the book of John has been building up to this theme (**John 2:12,23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1 cf. 18:28, 39; 19:14**). The symbolism of the slaughtering of the Passover lamb (All day that Thursday), and the Passover (Beginning at 6:00 P.M. 14th of Nissan/March or April) is the culmination of the perfect timing of God and His hour of glory.

Our passage today gives us an extended view of the “Lord’s/Last Supper” and is unique to John. He does not emphasize the institution of the “Communion” as much as he does the sacrifice, love and humility of Christ, which is the foundation to his book. This is truly a story of humility, love and betrayal. Love is the overriding ethic that John is emphasizing (see **John 3:16**). Here he emphasizes at least three aspects of Christ’s love that we need to meditate on day and night.

From the Head...

Christ’s Love is Transforming (**John 13:1-17**)

Verses one and two set up the rest of this book. Jesus in spite of His knowledge of His power (v. 3), and that He was going back to His Father (v.3), and that He was about to be betrayed by those that He was sacrificing Himself for, He still loved them, and He still served them (see **John 13:3-5** cf. **Romans 5:8**). The following is an important part of Johannine theology. “...not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (**1 John 4:10**). “We love because He first loved us” (**1 John 4:19**). Christ’s love is demonstrated by His act of humility, which is both symbolic and exemplary.

First we see His act as a **Symbol of our Spiritual Cleansing** (vv. 6-10). Until we are “Washed” by God, we are useless for any good works (see **Titus 3:5**). This is indicative from Christ’s statement in verse 8 to Peter. He is dealing with Peter’s pride and religious zeal. The Jews would have already bathed ceremonially in anticipation of the Passover, and were only in need of a foot washing at the place where they would have the dinner (Usually done by a servant), since their feet would get quite dirty on the trip over. This is symbolic of the sanctification process of believers. We are cleansed by Christ, but we are in need of cleansing as we walk in an impure world (Through repentance and faith).

This act of Christ leads to the **Second** meaning and duty of the foot washing; that it is **Our Standard of Service/Humility in Christ** (vv. 12-17). We often see works as something that we do not want to be part of, when in reality, in Christ, we are able to do what He calls us to do (**Ephesians 2:8-10**). It is because we are washed by Christ that, we can be of service to Him.

It is by the love of Christ that we are transformed to become what He wants us to be (**Romans 8:30**)! It doesn’t leave us impotent. It penetrates our stone cold hearts and gives us moldable hearts that begin to be transformed by His love! And it is by obedience to Christ that we are blessed (v. 17).

Christ’s Love is Enduring (**John 13:18-30**)

Verses 18-20 show us the severity of the betrayal, the foreknowledge of the betrayal as part of the plan, and the lasting result of the betrayal. Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 to highlight the reality that Judas was considered a trusted friend. The hurt had to be great! As a matter of fact it appears obvious in the following verses that it was Judas who was given the place of honor (Left side) at the table.¹ The breaking of bread with anyone is a gesture of love and friendship and loyalty (see

¹ It is important to note that Da Vinci’s “Last Supper” is all wrong historically. The disciples would have been sitting on the floor leaning on one another. In reality Christ would have been at the head with most of His disciples to His right, while one guest (Guest of honor) would have sat on His left, with Christ leaning on him.

John 13:18 cf. **Psalm 41:9**). The breaking of bread in the Passover/Seder ceremony is called the **YACHUTZ** in which the middle of three pieces of unleavened bread is broken, and half of the bread is eaten, while the other half is hidden for the “Afikomen” (After supper), when a young child finds the piece and it is broken up and distributed to all there. While that middle bread represents Isaac in some traditions and the Hebrew priests in others, there is no explanation for why it is broken, and then hidden, and then eaten by all. As believers we see even that symbolism as the breaking of the 2nd person of the trinity, the resurrection for the enduring benefit of all. Christ had a deep love for Judas in spite of his wicked heart. It is that same love that hardens the hardened heart (see **John 12:40**).

Christ's Love is Reflected in His Creation (John 13:31-38)

While we often point to so many external manifestations of Christ in our lives as “Proof” of our faith, Christ directs us to the one thing that can't be duplicated without His power in us. We are called to love like Christ loved, unconditionally! Salvation is God's love “Being perfected in us” (**1 John 4:9-13**). This love is a love that loves beyond the desire to be loved back. In fact it is Christ who loves Judas, even though He is well aware that he is His betrayer.

...to the Heart

Christ goes to the cross so that we could be cleansed of guilt, shame and wrath, and then calls us to live worthy of it. His love is not normal in a world that lives for its own gain. His love sacrifices for the other so that His father can be glorified, so that others can enjoy the glory of God! We are definitely in need of a foot washing in order to be experientially cleansed from our sin, but we must see that the gospel of Jesus Christ has cleansed us, and we are free to serve Him, and love Him, and then to love one another! It is in this sacrificial love that we are called to, and which will bring forth the joy and peace we so miss!

For Further Reading: “*The New Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*” William Barclay; “*The Gospel of John*,” F.F. Bruce; “*The New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of John*,” William Hendriksen; “*Preaching the Word; John: That You May Believe*,” R. Kent Hughes; “*The NIV Application Commentary: John*,” Gary M. Burge; “*The Pillar NT Commentary: The Gospel According to John*,” D.A. Carson

Next Weeks Verses: John 14:1-31

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