

Exegetical Notes, John 13:1-20
“No Servant Is Greater than his Master”

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John 13:1-20

Verses 1-5

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.

² The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

- The other Gospels make it clear that Jesus and his disciples were gathered in the upper room to eat the Passover supper.
- At that time, Jesus was fully aware of the Father's plan for the salvation of the world and all that lay before him. Even knowing that this meant that he would be crucified, Jesus pressed on because he loved all those who believed in him. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him and that things were already set in motion to that end. Jesus knew that he would soon return to the Father.
- As the meal was in progress, Jesus got up and wrapped a towel around his waist. He then began to wash his disciples' feet. This act was usually done upon arrival in a home. A servant would wash the guests' feet. Jesus was clearly acting the servant's role to teach his disciples humility. Though no servant had washed their feet upon arrival, none of them had offered to perform this task for the others. Jesus waited until the middle of the meal to do what should have been done before it began to show his disciples the problem.

Verses 6-11

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

⁷ *Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

⁸ *“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

⁹ *“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

¹⁰ *Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”*

¹¹ *For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*

- Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. He knew it was inappropriate for the Messiah to wash his feet.
- Even after Jesus told Peter that he did not understand what was happening at that time but would later, Peter refused to let Jesus wash his feet.
- Jesus told Peter that unless he submitted to this “washing” he had no standing with Jesus. So Peter asked Jesus to wash all of him, not just his feet. Peter wanted to be Jesus’ man completely. Jesus responded that all Peter had to do was submit to what the Lord required.
- The text makes it clear that Jesus knew Judas’ role in the plan of God.

Verses 12-17

¹² *When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them.*

¹³ *“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.*

¹⁴ *Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

- When he had finished washing their feet, even Judas’ feet, Jesus explained what he had done by washing their feet. He had set them an example. He, who was their teacher and Lord, had washed their feet. So they should be careful about each other and serve each other.
- Jesus promised that blessing would follow after those who learned from his example and sought to do as he had done.

Verses 18-20

“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: ‘He who shared my bread has turned^[a] against me.’^[b]

¹⁹ “I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am. ²⁰ Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

- Jesus then revealed that he knew that Judas was about to betray him. The quotation is from Psalm 41:9. Jesus wanted to forewarn the disciples of what was ahead for him.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *No Servant Is Greater Than His Master*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)