



SERMON TITLE: The God of the Towel

DATE: August 16, 2020

SCRIPTURE: John 13:1-11

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his own biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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This morning we pick back up in our study through the Gospel of John. We are in John 13. John 13-17 is commonly referred to as The Upper Room Discourse—one of Jesus' large teaching blocks like the Sermon on the Mount. These chapters are extremely important b/c here Jesus tells his disciples how they will continue to follow him after he's gone. John 1-12 covers about three years in the life and ministry of Jesus—chapters 13-17 cover one night. The evening he shared his final Passover meal with his disciples. The night when Judas leaves to betray him. What Jesus teaches here takes us within 24 hours of his crucifixion.

Now, how many of you, if you could, would want to know when and how you were going to die? That's not something I want to know, but Jesus didn't have the luxury of not knowing. READ 13:1-3. These opening verses tell us that Jesus had a number of things on his mind that night. (1) Jesus knew the time of his death had come. He knew he was about to be betrayed, arrested, deserted, falsely accused and tried, denied, and crucified. (2) Jesus knew that the Father had turned all power and authority over to him—meaning, he was in charge of everything that was about to happen. (3) Jesus knew he had come from God and he was returning to God. (4) Jesus knew (v2 and v11) that Judas was the one who would betray him. (5) And, Jesus knew Peter would deny him (skip to v38). To make matters worse, Luke tells us (chp22) what was on the disciples' minds that night. They were arguing about who would be the greatest in the Kingdom they thought Jesus was about to set up. All these things were on Jesus' mind that night. And knowing all this, Jesus demonstrated how much he loved his disciples by washing their feet—READ 13:4-5. What Jesus knows moves him to act in love (back to v1)—moves him to act out a demonstration of amazing love. Foot washing was a common practice in those days. People wore sandals on dusty, dirty, dung-strewn roads and when they entered a home, the lowliest house servant would wash their dirty, nasty feet. Because Jesus and his men were using someone's borrowed upstairs room, there was no one there to wash their feet. Remember, the disciples are arguing about who will be the greatest in the kingdom. They're definitely not thinking of washing anyone's feet! So Jesus uses this moment to not only show these men how much he loved them but also to show them what kind of Messiah he is. Washing their feet did not just meet a practical need—it showed the disciples who Jesus actually is—and even more—it showed those men who God really is. This is God stooping to the position of the lowest house slave—the least of the least—in order to serve these men who, at this moment, are only concerned about themselves. But the most astounding thing to me is—Jesus washed Judas' feet. Knowing what Judas had done (he had stolen money from the ministry fund), and knowing that he had been plotting to betray him and was about to make it happen, Jesus washes his feet. Why would he do that? (1) Jesus washed Judas' feet b/c he loved the Father. He did this to Judas, but for the Father—*but even more*—(2) He washed Judas' feet in order to show us what God is really like. He is, as Jim McGuiggan puts it, "The God of the Towel." Here we see the servant heart of God (cf Mark 10:45; Luke 22:37—"I am among you as one who serves.") Then Jesus comes to Peter. Peter takes one look at Jesus and tells him, "You are definitely not washing my feet." READ 13:6-11. To which Jesus says, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me"—meaning, "Peter, this is not just about what I'm doing; this is about who I am. Serving is part of my character—part of my very being—it's the way I lead—the way I love—and unless you receive me like this, unless you let me serve you like this, you cannot experience true friendship with me. This isn't so much a threat as it is a fact. "Peter, this is the kind of Messiah that I am. You take me like this or not at all." Then the focus shifts back to Judas in v10 when Jesus says "And you are clean, but not all of you, for he knew who was going to betray him." And with this shift, we drop to a deeper level of meaning. There's the "menial" meaning—Jesus humbles himself to serve these men by meeting a very necessary, practical need. He washes their feet b/c that's the kind of Messiah he is.

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But here there is also a “metaphorical” meaning. It was something they would not understand until later, after his death and resurrection. “You are clean, but not all of you.” “Clean” here is a metaphor of salvation. These men are “clean”/“saved b/c by faith they belong to Jesus (cf Jn 15:3). But not Judas. He had a view of the Messiah that wasn’t true to what Jesus said and did. He wanted a God of power and might and vengeance that would overthrow the Romans and set up the Kingdom of God on earth right then and there. Because he could not accept the kind of Messiah Jesus actually is, he was not “clean”—he had no part with Jesus. No one understood any of this at that time. But they had to take Jesus as the servant-King that he is. After all, if they would not accept a Messiah who washed their feet, how would they accept a Messiah who would die for their sins? Jesus washed their feet b/c he was the only one who would do it. He died for our sins b/c he was the only one who *could* do it. Here’s the “Big Idea” that ties all this together. The God who stoops to serve also suffers to save. Isn’t that good? One more time, the God who stoops to serve also suffers to save. Take that with you this week as you continue to navigate life in these troubled times.

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Discussion Starters — Begin by having someone read John 13:1-11

- How did the Passover foreshadow what was about to happen on the night Jesus had his final meal with his disciples?
- Would you want to know how and when you will die? Why or why not? Kind of a freaky question isn’t it?
- See how many things your group can list that Jesus knew that Passover night. Charlie mentioned five. According to Luke 22, what were the disciples discussing around the table that night?
- With all these things swirling around in Jesus’ mind, how did he act? How is it possible to be weighed down with all kinds of things going through your head and yet still act in love toward people who just don’t get it?
- What do we learn here about Jesus’ willingness to wash his disciples’ feet? How does Philippians 2:6-9 tie into what Jesus does here?
- Knowing what Jesus knows, what do you think about Jesus washing Judas’ feet? What does that tell you about Jesus?
- Why do you think Peter initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet? What was Jesus saying to Peter when he said, “Unless I wash your feet, you have not part of me? Was that a threat?”
- What application might we find in Jesus’ statement—“You don’t understand what I’m doing now, but you will later on”?
- Read vv9-11—What is the deeper, metaphorical meaning behind the statement: “You are clean, but not every one of you?” How does foot-washing intersect with what happened on the Cross? (hint: think of Charlie’s “Big Idea” for this message)
- What is your biggest “take-away” from this passage and your group’s discussion of this passage? What difference does all this make at home, at work, as you navigate life in this crazy, chaotic time? Knowing what you know about all that’s going on, how can you demonstrate a Jesus’-style, servant-hearted love for people who just don’t get it?