

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/12/93
John 13:1-5 "The Master Became a Servant"

Intro:

Illust: Story about Lincoln's humble treatment of Gen. McClellan

This morning we are going to begin a new Sunday morning series entitled, "Called to be Servants." Our text of study will be one of the most powerful, mind-boggling passages in the Word of God, that being the 13th chapter of John.

Why are we going to explore the topic of servanthood in John 13? I'll pose 2 reasons. For one, the church today stands in great need of the reminder that we have been called to be servants. As followers of Christ, we are to be servants. Tragically, the modern church has developed a "consumer mentality."

Illust:

Think about something. How do we often go about finding a new church? We talk about "shopping for churches" much like we shop for a house or a car. Baby-boomers (and baby-busters) ask questions like, "What will the church do for me? Will it meet my needs? Will it provide programs that make my life more pleasant?"

And unfortunately, too often the evangelical church has catered to such demands, and has become little more than a religious country club. The best churches are seen as those that offer the greatest number of services to customers.

Friends, is that what God has called the church to be? What is our calling? John 13 tells us. We have been called to be servants.

There's another reason we need to expose ourselves to John 13. Simply put, it's this. What happened when Jesus met with His 12 disciples in that Upper Room in Jerusalem changed the world forever. It was there that Jesus gave His disciples a model, an object lesson, a living illustration they would never forget. It was there that He called us to follow in His steps as servants. We need to come to grips with Jn 13.

So for the next 6 weeks or so, we want to venture onto the holy ground of John 13. Our aim is twofold. One, we want to learn to appreciate in a greater way than ever before the condescending love of our Great Savior who became a Servant. And secondly, we want to learn what it means for us to be and to live as servants.

Q: What does it mean to be a servant?

Proposition: Our Lord gives us an object lesson on Servanthood in John 13:1-5.

I. Jesus the Sovereign (1-3).

A. Jesus knew the Father's Plan (1-2).

B. Jesus knew the Father's Purpose (3).

II. Jesus the Servant (4-5).

A. His Actions

B. His Aim

1. To illustrate the need for servants

2. To illustrate the need for cleansing

John 13 begins the final major section of this gospel, a section lasting 5 chapters. The section is known as the Farewell, Upper Room discourse. Why? Because the events beginning in John 13 took place in the upper room of a Jerusalem house. And the words Jesus spoke were the climax of His investment into the lives of His followers.

Quote: G. Campbell Morgan (227), "For the devout student of the oracles of God, the wonder of this section never ceases. Like the alternating lights of the Urim and Thummim upon the breastplate of the high priest of old, the story proceeds, radiant with glory, and yet almost terrible with deep darkness."

V 1 "Now before the feast of the passover"

The scene is sobering. It's Passover. Thirteen men are gathered in an upper room to eat the Passover meal. Jesus is now 33 and 1/2 years of age. His public ministry had lasted 3 1/2 years. In less than 24 hours, He would be nailed to a splintery cross, executed as a vile criminal.

But never think for a moment that fate surprised Jesus, that things took an unexpected turn for the worse, that Jesus failed His mission.

Listen. Jesus' death was no accident. Do you know why? Jesus is the Sovereign. The first attribute that John 13 highlights about Jesus is His sovereignty.

I. Jesus the Sovereign (1-3).

Vv 1-3 "Now before the feast of the passover..."

The apostle John is the human author of these words. John was there that night. He wrote this gospel many years later. But something struck him that He never forgot.

Notice the word "knew" in v 1. And the word "knowing" in v 3. The text is clear that Jesus "knew." He had a sovereign knowledge of the events surrounding His betrayal and death. Jesus is the Sovereign.

Q: What did Jesus know?

A. Jesus knew the Father's Plan (1-2).

V 1 "when Jesus knew that His hour was come..."

Time and time again, John emphasized that Jesus lived on a "heavenly timetable" (Wiersbe, 344).

2:4 Jesus told His mother at Cana, "Mine hour is not yet come."

7:30 "(the Jews at the Feast of Tab) sought to take Him...his hour was not yet come"

8:20 (conflict with Pharisees) "no man laid hands...for His hour was not yet come"

His hour had NOT yet come. Then...

12:23 "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified."

13:1 "Jesus knew that His hour was come"

17:1 (Jesus praying) "Father, the hour is come."

Q: What hour had come?

A: Obviously, the hour of Jesus' betrayal and death.

But did you notice how He referred to that hour? 12:23 "The hour is come that the Son of man should be GLORIFIED." From the human point of view, that hour meant suffering. From God's point of view, it meant glory.

The reason it meant glory was because it was the Father's Plan.

From eternity past it was the Father's Plan that His Son would be the Suffering Servant. 8 centuries before the fact, here's what God revealed about His Plan. We read in Isa 53:11 "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied; by His knowledge shall my righteous SERVANT justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities."

Jesus knew the Father's Plan. He knew that His hour had come when He would give His life for His people. He also knew He would conquer death and return to glory.

Listen. No man could lay a hand on Jesus, let alone kill Him, until the right hour arrived. His death was no accident. The Sovereign One made a deliberate choice to sacrifice His life.

So when Jesus gathered with the 12 in the upper room, He knew the end had come. Yet did He become introspective and preoccupied with Himself? We would have. But Jesus didn't. In fact, just the opposite.

13:1 "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end."

Let that phrase sink in. "He loved." The word is agape. True love is selfless. True love thinks of others. True love sacrifices and serves. That's what Jesus did.

He loved "His own." In eternity past, God the Father chose a people for His Son. Here "His own" refers primarily to the inner circle of Jesus' apostles. When Jesus began His public ministry, He went to the multitudes. But as the time came for Him to leave, He retreated from the crowds, and started spending more and more time in private with the 12. They would carry on His mission after He was gone.

He loved His own "unto the end." What does that mean? The word indicates "completion." The greek text says, "He loved them to the uttermost."

Jesus knew and loved His own. He also knew that His own trusted friend would betray Him.

V 2 "And supper being ended, the devil...Judas"

The timing is significant. From reading the other gospel accounts, we know that Judas had already devised a wicked scheme with the Jewish religious leaders.

V 2 reveals what was going on behind the scenes. It says the devil "put" into Judas' heart. The word lit. means "to throw." Wiersbe points out the connection with Eph 6:16, where we're told about the fiery darts of the wicked one.

What a tragic figure is Judas! He betrayed His Lord.

You say, "Well doesn't v 2 say the devil put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus?" Yes, but Judas opened himself up to Satan's deadly influence.

How? He tolerated the sin of greed in his life (Jn 12:6). He was guilty of the sin of unbelief (Jn 6:64). He on his own accord chose to betray the Messiah for a handful of money (Jn 6:71). He was not an innocent victim of the devil.

As the Sovereign, Jesus knew the Father's Plan.

B. Jesus knew the Father's Purpose (3).

V 3 "Jesus knowing..."

Jesus knew He would be betrayed. He knew He would die. But mark this. There was absolutely no question that His death was NOT the end. Jesus knew 3 things:

1. The Father had given all things into His hands.
2. He was come from God.
3. He would return to God.

Don't miss this. When facing death's ugly face, Jesus was in complete command of the situation. In just a few hours, havoc would break loose. The disciples would be in a frenzy. The mob would be in a frenzy. The high priests would be in a frenzy. Pilate would be in a frenzy. But Jesus, even in His great hour of pain, would exhibit great calm and confidence. Why? He knew the Father's purpose.

Jesus is the Sovereign. Let that thought sink in. He's the Sovereign of your life. He knows you entirely. He knows your hurt, your pain, and your sin. And still He loves us.

Illust:

Tran: Jesus is the Sovereign. That's what makes vv 4-5 all the more amazing.

II. Jesus the Servant (4-5).

No doubt when the disciples first got to the upper room, their feet were dirty. They had come from Bethany. The roads of Palestine were unsurfaced. In dry weather they were deep in dust. In wet weather they were liquid mud. The disciples, no doubt, were wearing sandals, which were little more than a sole strapped on to the foot with a few leather straps.

Typically, there were waterpots by the door of a house. When guests came, a servant would greet them, and wash their feet.

Now watch this. When Jesus and the 12 arrived at the Upper Room that evening, there was no servant. There was no one there to wash their dirty, tired feet. One of the disciples should have stepped forward and performed the task. But none did.

Q: Why not?

The parallel account in Luke 22 gives us a clue. Do you know what the disciples did after the Passover meal? They disputed. They argued. About what? About which of them was the greatest.

Lk 22:24 "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest."

The upper room had a low, u-shaped table. You ate by reclining. Jesus was at the head. Perhaps the 12 jostled for position to get the most honored seats next to Jesus. And all the while, there by the door was the pitcher of water, the wash-basin, and the linen towel. But not one disciple stirred. Why not?

They were all too proud to serve.

And so Jesus waited, a long time. Finally, He got up from the table...

A. His Actions

Vv 4-5 "He riseth..."

The verbs are very vivid. And no wonder, for the actions happened right before the eyes of the writer John. Look at the actions of the Model Servant: He riseth. He laid aside. He took. He girded. He poured water. He washed. He wiped.

Oh friend, do you realize what Jesus did? The word "garments" is plural. Don't miss that. Jesus laid aside both His outer garment and His tunic. He wore nothing but a loin cloth. He assumed the dress of an Oriental slave.

To the utter consternation of the disciples, their Master went over to the wash stand, wrapped the towel around His waist, picked up the big basin of water, and headed for the nearest disciple.

Masters don't do things like that. But Jesus did. Jesus took the job of a slave.

Illust:

I agree with Wiersbe who observed (345), "The more you think about this scene, the more profound it becomes." What condescension!

Jesus was the Sovereign. Yet He took the place of a Servant. Why?

B. His Aim

Jesus' aim in assuming the role of a servant was two-fold.

1. To illustrate the need for servants

Vv 13-15 "...I have given you an example..."

It's been well said that humility is not thinking meanly of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all (Wiersbe, 345). Dr. J. H. Jowett said this, "Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing."

We need to let Jesus' example grip us. There's no room in the church for a worldly spirit of competition. We're not called to compete and criticise. We're called to serve.

There's a great need for servants today. Oh, we love to talk about serving. We enjoy being called servants. But Jesus called us to serve, just like He did.

Too often, we get it all turned around. We love to be preeminent. Our blood boils when someone slights us. We live for image and status.

Let me challenge you with this. The next time you're tempted to think about your dignity, and your prestige, and your rights, I want you to stop and see again the picture of the Son of God, girt with a towel, kneeling at His disciples' feet.

Q: Are you a servant? There's a great need for servants.

Illust:

There was another reason Jesus assumed the role of a servant, and washed the disciples' feet. First to illustrate the need for servants.

2. To illustrate the need for cleansing

Listen. The foot-washing was more than merely a lesson on humility. What Jesus did that night foreshadowed the cross itself. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He illustrated the need for cleansing.

Here's what He told Peter.

V 8 "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

We'll explore this in greater detail next week. But for now, please notice this. Until a person is cleansed, He has no part with Jesus.

We all have a desperate need for cleansing. Cleansing from what? From sin. And only Jesus can cleanse us. Only Jesus can give us a pure heart. That's why He went to the cross.

Q: Has Jesus ever made you clean?

You may wonder, "How does that happen?" First, if you want to be clean, you must admit that you are dirty. You must admit you are a sinner. Then you must look by faith to the cross. It was on the cross that Jesus died to wash away our sins.

Illust:

Conclusion:

Today we've seen Jesus as the Sovereign who became Jesus the Servant.

Illust: I read about a missionary who was at a religious festival in Brazil. He walked from booth to booth, and examined the wares. He saw a sign above one booth that said this: "Cheap Crosses." He thought to himself, "That's what many Christians are looking for these days--cheap crosses. My Lord's cross was not cheap. Why should mine be?"

Communion: