

Light, Love, Life ~ The Gospel of John

Chapters 13-15

In the second half of the book John really zooms in and slows down. John 13:1-18:27 covers one night (into the wee hours of the next morning). There are lots of details here that the other gospel writers don't capture. Let's dive in...

On several occasions we read something like, "*My hour has not yet come...*" or "*His time had not yet come...*" (see 2:4, 7:6, 7:30, 8:20). Now we read, "*Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father.*" (13:1) Everything we have read so far was leading to this. In the next few chapters we see Jesus' final address to His disciples prior to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Due to that, His words carry extra weight. You can sense the burden in His voice. John provides us with more and different details regarding the Last Supper than we get from the Synoptics.

There is A LOT here in these chapters. I'm simply going to try to draw our attention to significant themes/points.

John only uses the word "devil" or "Satan" four times throughout this book...three of which are in connection to Judas Iscariot (6:70, 13:2, 13:27). Here in verse 2 we're told the devil "*prompted*" Judas to betray Jesus and in verse 27 we're told that Satan "*entered into him*". Over the course of two millenia many have theorized about Judas: What was his motive? Was he just a victim in a cosmic plan? How much sympathy versus villainizing is appropriate concerning Judas? All understandable questions. The reality is...it's complicated...and we are not privy to all the information that we would like. Suffice it to say, just as we can wittingly or unwittingly cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we can wittingly or unwittingly cooperate with the devil/Satan. How witting or unwitting was Judas? Who knows? But wittingly or not, he (and we) are responsible for our actions and decisions.

What comes next is most revealing about what God is like. Next to the Cross, which is God's greatest self-revelation, the washing of the disciples' feet tells us something very instructive about our God...and, by extension, about what He wants for us.

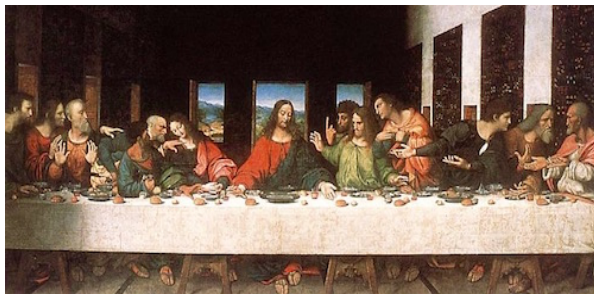
The washing of other people's feet was culturally one of the lowest tasks one could do. Some commentators even believe that a household slave had the right to refuse to do such a task. That's how low it was. For Jesus to stoop to doing so becomes one of the most beautiful and powerful things He ever taught His followers. (The question is whether or not we've learned the lesson.) If the great God of the universe whom we worship is willing to do something as lowly as washing feet, we need to pay attention or ask what we are to learn from this.

Additionally, there was something significant going on regarding the rabbi/disciple relationship. A disciple's identity was defined by their rabbi. Thus, your honor, status, prestige was determined by your rabbi/master. Our world operates on the premise of trying to make as much out of ourselves as possible...and having others recognize that and honor us accordingly. Jesus turns that notion on its ear.

Peter's resistance to Jesus washing his feet needs to be understood in this light. Peter understood that his own honor and status was tied to Jesus' honor and status, so he didn't like seeing Jesus lower Himself like this...because what that would mean for Peter (and the others and us). Jesus was willing to identify with the lowly, and He expects His followers to do the same. There's no place in His Kingdom for thinking we're above something or someone.

Jesus hammers the point home with, *"You call Me 'Teacher' and Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am...I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."* (13:13, 15) We want to keep this image of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in mind throughout the entire discourse of this evening.

Do you ever wonder what Jesus' relationship with Judas Iscariot was like throughout His ministry? Jesus knew all along that Judas would betray Him. Occasionally Jesus would drop a hint that no one understood at the time (see 6:64) But now at the Last Supper, Jesus just lays it out there, *"I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray Me."* (13:21) No more hints or innuendos. As you'd expect, this caused confusion and curiosity.



While we're all familiar with da Vinci's Last Supper painting (left), a more accurate portrayal of reclining at table is seen in the picture on the right. It's a much more intimate arrangement...it's almost spooning. Simon Peter, of course, was determined to get to the bottom of this and asked *"the disciple whom Jesus loved"* (i.e. John), who was reclined next to Jesus, to ask Jesus who He meant. Jesus, rather covertly, disclosed who He meant by handing Judas a piece of bread.

If people ever wrestle with the question of who is welcome to come and partake at the table of Jesus, then this act is very significant. Even Judas, the betrayer, was welcomed at the table and allowed to partake. If Judas is allowed, I'm not sure how we can make a case for excluding anybody.

A key word/theme in the book of John (that I now realize I failed to mention in the introduction...my bad) is Glory (or Glorify/Glorified). John picks up on this far more than the other three gospel writers combined. Recall from chapter 1 *"We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* (1:14, emphasis added) As the book progresses this theme becomes more and more prominent. In chapter 11 before the raising of Lazarus Jesus said, *"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."* (11:4, emphasis added). In chapter 12 we

read, “*Now My heart is troubled, and what shall I say? “Father, save Me from this hour”? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!’ Then a voice came from heaven, ‘I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.’”* (12:27-29, emphasis added)

Now in this chapter we read, “*Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify Him at once.*” (13:31-32, emphasis added)

Please allow me to share some words from author and mission strategist Steve Hawthorne, “*God can be loved only when He is known. That’s why the story of the Bible is the story of God revealing Himself in order to draw to Himself obedient worship, or glory, from the nations. With God’s passionate love at the core, the Bible is truly the story of His glory...To glorify someone is to recognize their intrinsic worth and beauty, and to speak of that feature in a public way.*” This is an excerpt from Hawthorne’s article “*The Story of His Glory*”. You overachievers can read the article in its entirety here:

https://oneworldmissions.com/media/PDF/Articles/hawthorne_thestoryof.pdf

How much do you think about glory? (God’s, your own, someone else’s). I suspect we think about it more than we recognize. If shame and embarrassment are things we try to avoid like the plague, then it stands to reason that we are drawn to the opposite...i.e. Glory. I believe we all want it far more than we realize. Additionally, consider (and be honest) how much time you spend thinking about the respect, admiration, esteem people give you (or that you want them to give you). But Jesus had a singular focus...to God be the Glory!

All along Jesus had been making God known. But people didn’t recognize it because they had a different understanding of God than Jesus was describing and portraying. Going back to the foot washing...this was Jesus revealing the character of God. The greatest Being in existence (the One in whose image we are) was willing to stoop to do the lowliest task. We need to refine/reassess greatness based on this evidence. We need to recalibrate our understanding of God based on Jesus’ revelation.

Jesus issues a “new command”. At first it doesn’t seem all that “new”: “*Love one another*”...what’s new about that? What’s new is how Jesus qualifies it, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” (13:34) This is a higher calling than “Love your neighbor as yourself.” We don’t always love ourselves that well, which makes us loving our neighbors as ourselves a rather flimsy standard. Loving as Jesus loves is the true measurement.

It is very popular to talk about “love” isn’t it? We just love love, don’t we? But we tend to have an overly sentimental, overly emotional understanding of what love is. Jesus is the definition of love. If we want to know what love is, we look to Jesus. Love looks like doing the job no one else wants to do, like washing dirty, sweaty, smelly, nasty feet. Love looks like protecting and raising the dignity of others. (Hmm, interestingly, all the non-miraculous demonstrations of love that John shares in this book are towards women: the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, Mary facing criticism for anointing Jesus’ feet.)

Jesus goes on to say that this will be the hallmark of those who follow Him, “*By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.*” (13:35) Notice that being a follower of Jesus isn’t about checking off all the correct doctrinal boxes or holding the “right” opinions on social, cultural, political issues. It’s about learning to love like Jesus.

We’re seeing a lot of Simon Peter in this passage, aren’t we? Initially resistant to having his feet washed...pestering John to get more information out of Jesus...asking Jesus where He was going and boldly claiming he was ready to die for Jesus. Jesus rather matter-of-factly predicts that Peter will deny Him three times before sunrise.

Clearly the news that Jesus would be leaving them (even if they didn’t understand exactly what that meant) was distressing to the disciples. So Jesus goes on to encourage them, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.*” (14:1) Yet another declaration of deity...let’s face it, to say “*trust in Me the way you trust in God*” would be blasphemous if Jesus wasn’t God.

At this stage of the game things were very transitional, which only Jesus fully understood. And we (humans) don’t like temporariness, transitions, liminality, things being in flux. Jesus’ words in 14:1-4 are meant to bring comfort by focusing on what’s coming, what they (and we) can count on, and by taking the focus off the awkwardness and unpleasantness of the present transition.

Jesus also tries to comfort them by stating that they already knew what they needed to know (14:4). They were not so convinced, as Thomas spoke for them, “*Lord, we don’t know where You are going, so how can we know the way?*” (14:5) Thomas nicely teed up the sixth “*I Am...*” statement, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” (14:6). Wow! That’s quite a claim. People often try to soften this statement a bit, but I think we should receive it full force. It doesn’t require explanation. Jesus meant exactly what He said. Jesus was going to the Father, and Jesus is the way for them (and us) to get to the Father.

They knew the way because they knew Jesus, as Jesus continued, “*If you really knew Me, you would know My Father also. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.*” (14:7) Then Philip pops in with what had to be an exasperating statement/request to Jesus, “*Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.*” (14:8) After three plus years together the disciples still weren’t fully grasping things, and here they were on the eve of what it was all leading up to. So Jesus declared it clearly, “*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.*” (14:9)...again blasphemous if not true. (But, of course, it is true.)

All the words Jesus had taught, all the work He had done and the signs He had performed, Jesus states unequivocally, are due to Him being in the Father and the Father being in Him. Now in case you’re wondering about the Holy Spirit (as good Trinitarian thinkers that you are), chapters 14-16 of John give us some of the most focused teaching on the Holy Spirit in all of Scripture.

Just a quick note before we get to the Holy Spirit. People may have questions about “*And I will do whatever you ask in My name...*” (14:13). We’re going to see variations of that come up in the next two chapters as well, so I’m going to hold off on commenting on that for now.

It is important to note the connection between loving Jesus and obeying Jesus (see verses 15, 21, and 23). Love is not an emotion or a sentiment; rather it is a decision of the will, as is obedience. To love Jesus is to obey Jesus. Sadly, what we see far too often are people (church-going Christians) who try to rationalize away the commands of Jesus.

OK, now let’s see what Jesus has to tell them/us about the Spirit...

- He calls the Holy Spirit the Counselor or Advocate or Comforter or Helper, depending on the translation you’re using (see verse 16 and 26). In Greek it is the word “parakletos” which literally means “called to one’s side”.
- Jesus stresses the closeness/indwelling of the Spirit by saying, “*...He lives with you and will be in you.*” (14:17)
- In most English translations the Holy Spirit is referred to as “He” (notice the use of the masculine pronoun in verse 17). BUT, the pronoun in Greek is actually neuter and can be she. (Personally, I’m cool with He or She...I’m not OK with It...please don’t refer to the Holy Spirit as an It. And, just FYI, the word “spirit” is actually feminine.)
- Notice Jesus’ connection to the Spirit. Jesus says “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*” (14:18) But He comes to us through the Spirit...so He and the Spirit are One, just like He and the Father are One, just like the Father and the Spirit are One...so very Trinitarian. Now let’s take it one step further (actually Jesus takes it one step further), “*...I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.*” (14:20) We, followers of Jesus, are invited into the Trinity! That is deep and mind-blowing! We could maybe even say that the goal of the Trinity is actually a Quadrinity. This is essentially what Jesus is saying in this section. Peter would later say that we are “*participants in the divine nature*” (II Peter 1:4) Our Eastern brothers/sisters call it Theosis, or union with God.
- One of the main roles of the Holy Spirit is to “*...teach you all things...*” (14:26) So the Spirit is our continuous Teacher in the way of Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit is also our peace. Jesus said, “*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you.*” (14:27). That quality that Jesus possessed...that security, that winsomeness, that confidence, that peace was the Spirit in Him, and He’s giving the Spirit to us.
- Once we understand that the Spirit resides in believers, we can make sense of what Jesus said earlier, “*[You] will do even greater things than these...*” (14:12). As a human Jesus could only be in one place at a time. With His Spirit abiding in His people, the work of

Jesus expands across the globe. That's certainly "greater" than being localized in one place.

- The Spirit testifies about Jesus (15:26)

We now come to the final "I Am..." statement...*"I am the true vine..."* (15:1) Vine and vineyard are common/familiar Scriptural language to refer to Israel. For example, speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, God said of Israel, *"I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"* (Jeremiah 2:21) Everything that Israel was meant to do and be is now focused on one individual...the True Vine.

The impetus of Jesus' comments about vine and branches is on the vital need for connection (or remaining/abiding in Him). The whole point is fruit bearing...a gardener doesn't plant a vineyard for decoration. And, as Jesus stresses, a branch can only bear fruit when connected to the vine.

But it's about more than fruit bearing, as desirable as that is. It's also about love and joy. *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love."* (15:9, emphasis added) *"I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."* (15:11, emphasis added)

And once again we see the connection between love/relationship and obedience...

"If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have obeyed My Father's commands and remain in His love." (15:10), and *"You are My friends if you do what I command."* (15:14) This is not to say that God's/Jesus' love for us is conditional, but rather our experience of His love is very much conditional. A good picture/example would be in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The father still loved his wayward son, even when that son disavowed his father and left home. But that son wasn't able to experience that love until he came back home.

In 15:7 we read, *"If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."*, and in 15:16 we read, *".the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name."* (Told you we'd see this again:). We're going to see it again in chapter 16, so I'm going to punt until then (next week's notes).

Jesus then goes on to describe our relationship with the world, which will/should reflect His relationship with the world. Jesus prepares His followers (then and now) for what to expect from the world...hatred. Why? We don't belong to the world. This is another way of saying that we (Christians/the Church) should be a holy, set apart, distinct people group in the world. We should not reflect or resemble the world but rather reflect, resemble, and represent Jesus and His Kingdom.

John is very consistent on this point. In his letter known as I John, we read, *"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but*

whoever does the will of God lives forever.” (I John 2:15-17). Jesus’ own brother, James, concurs when he says, “...*don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*” (James 4:4)

Now you might be thinking, “*But wait, doesn’t John 3:16 say ‘God so loved the world...?’*” Yes, yes it does. But the word “world” (kosmos in Greek) can refer to a few different things. It can refer to planet earth; it can refer to humanity as a whole (as it does in John 3:16); it can refer to social/cultural values and practices that are under the influence/control of Satan and are opposed to God (this is the meaning here in John 15, and in I John and James and anywhere else where it’s viewed negatively.)

When we live faithful to Jesus, there’s a strong likelihood that it will raise the ire of some. Jesus forewarns us of this...we should expect it. And, more importantly, we should respond in the same way as Jesus...that’s the challenging part. Living faithfully (obediently) to Jesus is HOW we testify about Jesus, HOW we show the world Who the true King is and HOW to live as humans were intended/created to live. Thankfully, we have the teachings and example of Jesus (preserved in Scripture) and the empowering Holy Spirit indwelling us. And we also have one another for support and encouragement.

OK, admittedly, it seems very awkward...even wrong perhaps...to pause the Last Supper discourse midstream. But, alas, that’s what we’re going to do. We will pick up the rest next week.

Possible Discussion Questions

- Possible Icebreaker: When you left home, how prepared did you feel? In retrospect, how prepared were you?
- What do you think and feel about Judas (Iscairiot)?
- What would/could be the modern day equivalent to washing feet?
- When are you tempted to think more highly of yourself than you ought? What does the whole foot washing scene have to say to that? If you’re honest, is there something you think you’re above doing, or are there people you’re above associating with?
- Whom do you love the way Jesus loves you?
- In your church experience throughout your life, what various perspectives have you encountered regarding who can participate in the Lord’s Supper/ Communion/ Eucharist?
- What are your personal beliefs about that?

- How much do you think about glory? What does it look like for you/us to live for God's glory?
- Simon Peter clearly overestimated his own commitment to Jesus. When have you overestimated yourself, or when were you more confident in yourself than you should have been?
- Jesus was preparing the disciples for a season of transition. Describe a season of transition you've experienced in your life. Sometimes (oftentimes) the comfort and security of permanentness and familiarity can cause us to avoid change/transitions that could be opportunities for growth. How have you experienced the fear of change?
- What do you think and feel about Jesus saying, "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"? Why do you think people chafe at this statement?
- It's easy to say that we love Jesus. It's not so easy to obey Him. Jesus doesn't want our sentiment. He wants, and deserves, our obedience. In what ways do you struggle to live in obedience to Jesus?
- How would you describe the Holy Spirit in your life to someone?
- How have you experienced the Holy Spirit as a Helper, Comforter, Counselor, Advocate, Teacher in your life?
- How have you experienced peace that can only be attributed to the Holy Spirit in your life?
- Which of the "*I Am..*" statements is most significant to you and why?
- What is the sort/type of "fruit" that Jesus wants/expects from His followers?
- How do you feel about the idea of not belonging to this world? In what ways are you drawn to belong to this world? Or, asked another way, in what ways do you perhaps "love" the world in unhealthy ways?
- How do you/we testify about Jesus?

Soul Training Exercise

Read: John chapters 16-18

Memorize: John 17:3