

The Humble Love of Christ

Scripture: John 13:1–17

Code: 43-68

I want you to turn to John chapter 13 and we're going to look at the opening verses of this chapter. John 13. We call it the Humility of Love, and that is exactly what it is about. I want to remind you where we are in our study of the life of Christ written by the apostle John. We are on Thursday night of His final week before His death and resurrection. He will be arrested early in the morning, really in the darkness of the middle of the night. He will undergo a false trial in the wee hours of Friday. He will be executed on Friday. He will die as the true Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb. This is Thursday night, the night before.

This is when the northern Jews, the north part of Israel celebrated their Passover. The southern Jews celebrated it on Friday; the northern ones on Thursday night. It is that Thursday night he is meeting for the Passover, which is a memorial dinner that commemorates God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt when the angel of death passed by the homes that had the blood of the lamb on the door. God is wanting to be remembered in this feast as the Savior and Deliverer of His people.

This is that Thursday night when Jesus with the twelve alone, nobody else was there for obvious reasons. The Jews were after Him, and He had to hold this feast with them in secret before He was arrested later in the garden that same night. So it is Thursday night, and on that Thursday night, our Lord gave a series of promises to His disciples that extend to all of us. Those are contained in chapter 13-16. Four monumental chapters loaded with the promises of the Lord for those He loved. Certainly, it started with the disciples, but it extends to all believers through all of history.

Then the seventeenth chapter, He goes to the Father and He prays that the Father would fulfill all of those promises. At that point, He says they are all extended beyond the apostles to all who will believe after them. So what we're going to have here in chapters 13-16 is the final legacy of Jesus to His own. I wrote a book on that called *The Upper Room*.

But what is happening every day is that you are called to love one another, and you are given a capacity to do that, and you need to have a model for that that's something short of dying. So what does that look like? What does that look like? Well, it looks like Jesus here in this passage. This is an unparalleled section where the Lord Jesus with His own apostles teaches them by example what it means to love, what it means to love fully, what it means to love to the end. I love you to the end, and here is your first lesson. This is how love acts.

It's a critical lesson for reasons that should have been clear to you when I was reading 1 John because loving one another, first of all, assures us of our salvation. You remember what John said? When you love, it removes fear in the face of judgment. Perfect love casts out fear. You're looking at the judgment of God, you don't have any fear because you know you've escaped the judgment of God. There's no condemnation. Why? How do you know that? You know that because you have a love that is a deposit by God, which means you belong to Him. God is love and those who love belong to God.

Not only does the world know us by our love, but we know our own condition before God by our love. If you say you're a believer and you hate your brother, you're a liar. So if you say you're a believer and you love your brother, then you know the truth is in you. This is very, very personal in that sense. We love another, and it becomes assurance for us. We love one another and it becomes a testimony to the world, as I commented on earlier in verses 34 and 35. Look at it, John 13. "A new commandment I give you that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love another. By this," this love, "all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another."

This is how we put Christianity on display. The most devout of us don't murder people. The most devout of us love people. We love the world in the way that God does, but especially do we love the brotherhood, others in Christ. We manifest that love in humble expressions like this one. Now, foot washing was a necessity. Foot washing, in case you didn't know, is still a necessity. I just want to remind you of that. I don't want it to fade away. I think you know that. There are certain benefits to keeping your feet clean for you and all the people you connect to. So we get that. We walk through the world. We walk through the world.

Well, in ancient times, sandals didn't do a whole lot with dusty roads or muddy roads or damp roads, and so feet were dirty and dusty. Before every house, there was a water pot in the front of the house because you didn't go tracking mud into the house. So there was a water pot outside for the accommodation of foot washing. It would fall to a humble person or in some cases, the lowliest slave or the lowliest servant to do the foot washing because it was the lowliest task. Very unskilled and not the most enjoyable duty, but very necessary.

In ancient times, in biblical times, when they had a meal, a meal like the Passover lasted for hours and hours. They would recline. They wouldn't sit in a chair, but they would recline. So your head was here and somebody's feet were here. Simple courtesy would indicate that we ought to be taking care of those feet. So that's how it was. When you went to a house, like today, sometimes people make even me and Patricia take our shoes off at the door to go in. I understand that, but I actually think sometimes that could be worse. But anyway, we'll get on to something else. Oh no, but you understand the point.

They were meeting in the upper room on this Thursday night, the Lord and His disciples. His earthly ministry was coming to an end, and it says that in verse 3, "He knew that He had come forth from God and was going back to God." That's what it says in verse 1. He knew He would depart out of this world to the Father. That's a big feature here. He's on the way back to glory. He's going to go back to the glory He had with the Father before the world began. He's going to go back to glory. It seems like maybe this is a moment when somebody should wash His feet, right?

Maybe after all these 33 years of humiliation, somebody might step up and realizing that He's on the way to the cross and the resurrection and the ascension that maybe it's time for us to recognize His royalty, His majesty, His glory, somebody stepped up and wash His feet. He is about to receive the name that is above every name, the name Lord, at which name all knees will bow in heaven and earth and under the earth. But nobody does. Nobody does any foot washing.

That sets the stage. They're all reclining at dinner with dirty feet. This is a very discourteous thing. So in that context, the Lord must have been very disappointed, very disappointed. But, remember, they were having an argument. They were having an argument that very moment according to

Luke 22. They were arguing about which of them was the greatest in the kingdom, see. So they were all about their own dignity, their own honor, their own elevation. In that setting, nobody wanted to take the role of slave, so nobody did.

This has to be grieving to the Lord. This is just another indication of their weakness, their spiritual indolence, but He loved them anyway, and this is what makes His love so incredible because they were so ugly at that point, so ugly. Then there was Judas. How ugly was he? But that's how we come to understand what it means that He loved them to the max, to the end, to the full in spite of it.

As we look at this, just a few points to consider. First, His love stated, verse 1, and we've already done that. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." That states His love. That's John making that inspired statement under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He knows His hour is coming. He knows He's headed to the Father. He repeats it again in verse 3. His glory is on the horizon. Yeah, of course, His death is imminent and immediate, but through that, out of the grace into glory at the ascension, He knows all of this.

He should be the one being honored, being exalted, being lifted up, being treated with courtesy, but He's not. He's not. So he puts His love on display to, listen, undeserving, weak, selfish, self-centered, self-absorbed disciples, who with that kind of an attitude aren't going to do a whole lot to advance the testimony of the church. That doesn't help. If, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, you have love for one another," what are they going to think about you behaving like this? I mean the apostles write about that later, about devouring and biting one another and not preferring one another in love.

If that is what's going on in your church, if there is contention and strife and factions, we know all of that is laid out by the apostles in the epistles. If that's what the world sees, what is going to be their conclusion? Not that we've been transformed to manifest some divine kind of love that is unlike anything the world knows. This would have been a time when He might have rebuked them, when He might have just shredded them like He did the Pharisees that week, but He doesn't. He just loves them, and He gives them a model of how they are to love. He protects them.

The last acts of Jesus stand out as acts of love, all the way through chapter 17. "His love no end or measure knows, no change can turn its course. Eternally the same it flows from one eternal source." In eternal love, He loved them before they were ever born. He loved them from eternity into eternity. He loved them with an everlasting love. "Loved with everlasting love," the hymn writer says, "led by grace that love to know." By grace, by grace He loved them. He gives the fullest expression of this love. So that is love stated.

The second point, love spurned. Love spurned is in verse 2, and you say, "Why is this here?" This incredible statement about love, which we considered last week and now dropping in on it. "During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him." Do we really need that? We were just getting into this whole expression of love. What is this about? This is ugly. This is disastrous for Judas. This is eternally damning for him.

We don't even understand Judas. Isn't he difficult to understand for believers? How can he be with Christ for three years, see everything, hear everything, watch every act that Jesus did, know the absolute perfection of His life, and give Himself to Satan. He'd already done that. He'd already turned himself over to Satan. He had already put himself in Satan's hands, and now down in verse 27, Satan enters him.

Same night, Thursday night, at the dinner, Satan enters him and Jesus knew when Satan showed up. He knows what's in the heart of a man. He can read thoughts. He certainly knows when Satan, the invisible slanderer, shows up. Satan showed up right on time, right on schedule, and Jesus said to Judas, "What you do, do quickly." Go get it done. Go orchestrate the betrayal because we've got a time clock going now. The clock is ticking to make sure that I am executed when the Passover lambs are being killed tomorrow. Get the clock going.

Here is a man given to Satan. Jesus said about him in John 6:70, he was a devil. He was a devil. Why mention this here? Why? Because the contrast is stark. The contrast is instructive. The contrast drops a black curtain behind the scene. It makes everything in the expression of love stand out in bold relief. The blackest hatred contrasted with the purest love. Judas is a hater. Judas is a hater, and the more Jesus has failed to fulfill Judas's ambitions and greed, the more he has hated Jesus.

Judas is self-interested. He is driven by greed, driven by ambition, driven by self-satisfaction, and he has no capacity to love. Pride can't love. Self-interest can't love, and Judas can't love, but he can hate anything that stands in the way of his ambition. So you just need to know what's behind the picture here: the hatred of Judas.

The words of love which Jesus gives these verses and gives by this example capture our hearts, warm our hearts, draw us to love Him more while they cause Judas to hate Him more. One writer said, "I wish that the traitor's kiss that Judas gave was the only one, but in the spiritual sense, Jesus still has to endure it a thousand times to this hour. For hypocritically to confess Him with the mouth while the conduct betrays Him, to exalt Him to the skies in the virtue of His humanity while divesting Him of His divine glory tearing the crown of universal majesty from His head, to sing enthusiastic hymns to Him while trampling His gospel by word and deed, what is that? But a Judas kiss."

There are still Judases. So love is stated in verse 1 and love is spurred in the life of Judas, and we'll do more on him next week.

Then finally, thirdly, love is shown. Love is shown. How did he love, and how is that love manifest? I told you that the nature of this love is self-disinterest. The nature of this love is self-disinterest. It is completely consumed with the object of love, and it will humble itself, and that's exactly what Jesus does. He gives us an example here of how to make the ultimate sacrifice short of death and love in a way that we can do our whole life long.

Jesus, knowing the Father had given all things into His hands, He knew who He was. We don't want anybody to think that because Jesus does this, He is simply a man and He's lowering Himself because He is a man and He wants to make it clear that He is to be humbled. No, John is very clear. "He came forth from God and was going back to God." This is a statement of His absolute, eternal being and deity. That is the whole point of His humiliation. He came from glory and stooped, and He stoops on Thursday night in that room.

"He got up from supper, laid aside His garments, and taking a towel, girded Himself, poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded." Now remember, verse 2 says, "During supper." They're already eating. They're into the Passover meal, and nobody has stepped up to wash feet, nobody.

By the way, 1 John 3:18, John reminds us, "Love not in word only, but in - " what? " - in deed." It is what you do that manifests that love. Jesus does what nobody else will do, what no one else would do. He rises from supper, takes off His outer garment, and is left just with an undergarment, which was typically worn. He takes a towel, and puts a towel around his waist. Then He takes the water out of the pitcher that was by the door of every place for foot washing, and He pours it into a basin, and He began then to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. He took His outer garment off to keep it from getting splattered and splashed and covered with dirt. It was a very humble thing to do.

For a fisherman to wash another fisherman's feet is a small condescension. It's a small act of humility, but for the Creator to wash the feet of proud men who are sinful in their pride is indeed an amazing condescension. You might think that He maybe, maybe – it's a stretch – but maybe He would wash the feet of those who were somehow sacred or those who were somehow holy. No, He washes the feet of those who are proud and self-interested, self-promoting, and ambitious. It's just what He does.

They have been walking to get to the upper room through the streets of Jerusalem, dirty, muddy, from Bethany. Dirt road getting out of the city to Bethany. They are in the midst of a sort of independent, each individual wanting to make sure He doesn't lower Himself in the eyes of Jesus by doing something that might somehow strike against His dignity. They all do nothing. They do nothing. So Jesus goes to the door, prepares, and washes their feet.

They has such short memories. It had been that week that He said to them, "Whoever would be greatest among you, let him be your – " what? " - servant, slave." It fell on deaf ears. It fell on deaf ears. So with calmness, majesty, He rises up, takes off His outer robe, puts on this towel, begins to wash. I don't want to speculate. You know I don't like to do that, but I know this devastated those men. You have to believe this is, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. This cannot be happening." That's the buzz that is eventually articulated by Peter. "This isn't right."

They are shocked, sorrowed, regretful, convicted because the Lord does what none of them were willing to do. Look, they knew that foot washing was the lowest thing on the sort of social ladder. It must have hurt deeply. It was a profound lesson on the issue of pride because that's exactly how they were acting. So Jesus goes along washing their feet. He comes to Simon Peter and, of course, by then the buzz has reached Peter and he has his own feelings as well. So he said to Him, "Lord, Lord," and he's trying to make a contrast, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" This can't be happening.

Now, look, Peter knew who Jesus was. He knew because he said, "You are the Holy One. To whom shall we go? You and you alone have the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that you are the Holy One." He said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." He knew who Jesus was. The rest knew who He was. There was no debate about that. He also knew who he was, the same guy who had said, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man." He had a lot of reminders from the Lord Himself about his sin.

In fact, it got bad that the Lord has said to him not too long before this, "Get behind me – " what? " – Satan!" So Peter is trying to make a contrast that makes sense to him. "Lord, you wash my feet? I am a sinful man," and he's speaking on behalf of the others as well. He's stunned. He can't let it happen. He can't let it happen.

Jesus answered and said to him in verse 7, "What I do, you do not realize now, but you will

understand hereafter.” He’s not talking about foot washing. Now He’s gone from the picture to the reality. He’s saying, “Peter, you still don’t get My humiliation. You don’t get it.” Now remember, their view of the Messiah was He comes triumphantly. They had a triumphalistic view of the Messiah. He comes; He establishes the kingdom. He throws out the enemies. He reigns and rules over Jerusalem, over Israel, and over the world, all of the things that the prophets had said; everything promised to David, everything promised to Abraham, reiterated in the prophets.

They still had a triumphalistic Messianic view. Even after the resurrection, Acts 1:6, they’re saying, “Will you at this time restore to us the kingdom?” Oh, they had that kingdom perspective. They couldn’t handle the humiliation of Jesus. So our Lord says to him, “You don’t understand, Peter. You will eventually understand, but this is part of My humiliation. In a sense, this is an example to you as to how you are to love, and it is also a metaphor for My incarnation, humiliation, and condescension. You don’t see all that, but you will hereafter.” And he did. If you read 1 Peter, he fully understood the condescension of Christ. “You are redeemed not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.” He understood the incarnation. He understood humiliation. He understood the execution of Jesus.

He writes about it in chapter 1. He says in chapter 2, “He bore on our sins, His own body on the cross.” He got that eventually, and he wrote about it. John got it and wrote about it as well and the other apostles. But they still didn’t understand this humiliation all the way to the cross. So He says, “Peter, you don’t realize now this humiliation. You will understand hereafter.” Well, Peter validates the fact that he doesn’t get it by saying this, “Never shall you wash my feet!” and the emphasis is on the pronouns. Never shall you, Lord, wash my, sinner, feet. Never!

It’s as if he said in the vernacular, “Cut it out. Stop! You’re not doing this.” Really, this is a pretty brash guy. He’s talking to the Creator by his own confession. He calls Jesus Lord and acts like he’s lord. The language here is extreme. The negation, never, is the strongest possible negation. It’s like saying in all eternity, forever, no time, no way, under no circumstances will you ever wash my feet. This is settled, conclusion fixed in concrete. It’s not going to happen.

Jesus said to him, “If I don’t wash you, you have no part with Me.” Hmm. To which Peter says in verse 9, “Then Lord, wash not only my feet, but my hands and my head.” He goes from one extreme to another. “You’ll never wash me!” “Wash everything!” What moved him so far so fast? He wanted more than anything else a relationship with Jesus Christ. Remember chapter 6, “Who do we go to?” Jesus says, “Will you go away?” “Where will we go? You have the words of eternal life. I want a relationship with you. Lord, if this is how I sustain a relationship with you, give me a bath! Give me a bath.”

What did Jesus mean when He said, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”? Well, He was not out of the illustration and into the reality. He was talking about the need that Peter had to be spiritually cleansed. He needed what Ezekiel promised in the New Covenant: the washing, the washing. He needed what Paul wrote to Titus about; the washing of regeneration. He needed spiritual cleansing, and Christ was condescending, humiliating Himself, going all the way to the cross to provide the means of that spiritual cleansing.

Peter, you can’t stop this humiliation. I’m going all the way down, past foot washing, way past foot washing to the cross. You have to accept it. You have to accept My humiliation, all the way down to

the cross because that is the only way you will be cleansed. That is the means of your cleansing. Peter was already saved by what Christ had not yet done and wouldn't do until the next couple of days, but it had already been applied to him, as to all Old Testament believers.

So Jesus says, "Nobody has a safe relationship with God unless that person has been cleansed by Jesus. If I don't wash you, if I don't wash you, you have no part with Me." Let me expand that a little. There is no salvation in any other name than the name of Jesus Christ. There is no forgiveness, no washing from sin, no redemption other than through Christ. "No man comes to the Father, but by Me." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

"You want to have a relationship with God? It comes through Me. If I don't cleanse you, you are not clean. You have no part with Me. The only salvation is through Jesus Christ." So our Lord goes from this simple act to draw the spiritual truth, to lay it down for all generations including us. Well, when He said that, obviously, Peter wanted the full treatment. Jesus follows up on this spiritual truth in verse 10. Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed, needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean and you are clean."

You don't need another bath. They would have bathed in the morning when they left probably Bethany, staying maybe with Martha and Lazarus, Mary. They would have left and walked all the way to whatever went on that day, and then finally to the upper room. They didn't need a bath. They just needed their feet washed. This is so magnificent. He's saying, "Peter, you don't need salvation. You just need some clean-up. You are clean." I want you to look at that.

He says, "Peter, you are clean. You are clean." If Peter was thinking, that was the greatest statement that had ever been made to him in his entire life because Jesus just said to him, "You're saved." He just told him, "You're saved." How many of you would like Jesus to show up, walk up to you and say, "By the way, I just want you to know you are saved"? Would that mean anything to you? Whoa, are you kidding? Look, I don't have doubts about my salvation, but that would set me into some kind of euphoria. I mean the devil can tempt any of us with some lingering doubts. He says, "You're all clean. You've all been saved. You've all been regenerated. You've all been redeemed. You've all been given life. But not all of you," verse 11, "for He knew the one who was betraying Him. For this reason He said, 'Not all of you are clean.'"

There was one unsaved person there, and our Lord makes clear that He says that. "You are clean, you men, but not all of you." What an incredible moment to hear that your salvation is valid. You say, how do I know my salvation is valid? I read it to you in 1 John, because you confessed Jesus is the Christ, because you love God, because you obey His commands, and because you love one another. That's the evidence. That's the evidence. You've been bathed. You're clean. You don't need to be cleaned again. You just need periodic foot washing. Well, what does that mean?

But as believers, what do we do? How do we live our lives? First John 1, we go on confessing our sins, and He goes on cleansing us from all unrighteousness, 1 John 1:9. That describes a believer. A believer is a person who, having been bathed, having been justified, having been regenerated still picks up the dust of the world and goes on confessing and being cleansed of that.

So, good news, Peter; you're saved. Peter just had so many weaknesses, didn't he? Does that encourage you? I mean if you see yourself like Peter, and you wonder, He says you're clean. How

could He think he's clean? Because he's been covered already by the righteousness of God through faith in Christ. But not all of you are, not all of you.

There's a final point. Love is stated. Love is spurned. Love is shown in this incredible act of our Lord. Love is shown that it reaches down to the lowest level, does the dirtiest job, takes care of the simplest needs, sacrificially, selflessly. Finally, love is summoned. I can do this in five minutes, the final verses. You watch.

Love is summoned here or commanded, if you will. "So when He had washed their feet," finished up, "and taken His garments," put them back on, reclined at the table again, "He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?'" And He goes back from the theological realities of that whole act, back to the practical application of love. "DO you know what I have done to you?" Of course they did. Of course they knew. "You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and you are right." How could anybody deny the lordship of Christ? I could take that verse and preach ten sermons on it. You call Me "Lord." You call me "Teacher" and I am; you're right.

"So if I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet, for I gave you an example that you should also do as I have done to you," or I did to you. This is the lesson. Love like this. Love selflessly, humbly, in the most menial, simple necessity of life. Start there, and all the more elevated things will come. Love at the lowest level of need. "I gave you an example. This is an example that you should do as I did to you." That's a summons from the Lord to His followers. "If I, the Lord," reasoning from the greater to the lesser. "If I, the Teacher have done this." "If I," in verse 16, "the Master and if I, the one who sent have done this, shouldn't you, the student, the slave, the one sent, do this? Shouldn't you who are less do this? If I, the most exalted, elevated person in the universe can stoop, can't you, who are infinitely less than me, humble yourselves?"

This whole lesson is all built around what Luke 22:24 says. They were arguing about which of them was the greatest. A lecture might have worked, but He'd done that. This example must have shaken them to the core. So how do you teach people to love? By loving. They're going to have to teach the church to love. How are they going to do that? With a lecture or by loving?

So, verse 17, the NAS says, "If you know these things," but it should be translated, "Since" because it's *ei* with the indicative, and *ei* with the indicative presents a statement of fact. "Since you know these things." Of course they know them because He just taught them. "Since you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." The second "if" is a different word altogether. It's *ean*, *ean*, and a different construction, altogether different construction. *Ean* introduces a clause with less certainty. The first statement is certain. "Since you know these things." The back end is not so certain, "If you do them."

That's where we live isn't it? We know we're supposed to love each other like this. If we do, since we know, if we do, what's the reward? You are blessed. Anybody want to cash in on that promise? Anybody want to be blessed? Anybody want God to open up heaven and dump blessing? How are you blessed in your life? How do you release heaven's blessing? By loving sacrificially, unselfishly, selflessly, humbly, without any thought of personal gain, personal fulfillment, personal satisfaction, but completely committed to the sheer well-being, joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and necessity of somebody else.

Scripture says, “How blessed are those who walk in the way of the Lord. How blessed are those who trust in the Lord. How blessed are those who hear the word of the Lord and obey it.” “If you do this, you are blessed.” One of the blessings is you’ll know you’re saved. The other blessing is the world will know you’re saved. The gospel will be lifted up and Christ exalted.

Lord, we thank you for our wonderful time together this morning round this passage. It’s a memorable, unforgettable illustration that should be in the back of our minds if not the front at all times. May we be faithful, faithful to love the way you love. It’s not mystical. It’s not emotional. It is loving by serving at the lowest level, caring for others, not because they’ve earned it or are worthy of it, but loving like you loved those who were proud and self-centered and arguing about their own dignity.

Lord, help us to love. May we humble ourselves, be meek and lowly like the Savior so that our love can be elevated. All of this we ask only for your glory and your glory in the church. In Christ’s name, amen.

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