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Loving To The Limit John 13:1-5

We are entering once more into another major section in John's Gospel. The first section that we encountered in John's Gospel of course was "**The Introduction**" (**John 1:1-18**). The introduction went from **John 1:1** to **John 1:18**.

After the introduction we then came to what we called "**The Period of Consideration**" (**John 1:19-4:54**). In this section we examined the honeymoon stage of Christ's public ministry. The honeymoon stage was characterized by an absence of any concerted effort by the Jewish people or the Jewish leadership to oppose Christ or to do Him harm. This section went from **John 1:19** to **John 4:54**.

Following "**The Period of Consideration**" we came to "**The Period of Controversy**" (**John 5:1-6:71**). In this section of Scripture the attitude of the Jewish people and particularly the Jewish leadership toward Christ had become unsettled, not only because of what He was doing, but mostly because of what He was saying. This section went from **John 5:1** to **John 6:71**.

Following this "**Period of Controversy**" we then entered the section that we entitled "**The Period of Conflict**" (**John 7:1-11:57**). During this period the unsettled attitude that the Jewish people and particularly the Jewish leadership had toward Christ had now become fixed or hardened. In fact, it had become so fixed that the Jewish leadership had begun to plan how they might kill Jesus. This section went from **John 7:1** to **John 11:57**.

This brought us to the "**The Period of Crisis**" (**John 12:1-12:50**). In this section of Scripture the actions of Christ ultimately forced the Jewish leaders to proceed forward with their plan to kill Him as soon as possible, or in other words, to kill Him during the Passover feast. This section of Scripture, "**The Period of Crisis**," went from **John 12:1** to **John 12:50**.

We are now leaving "**The Period of Crisis**." As we leave this particular section we are also leaving the public ministry of Christ behind as well. John will from this point on in his Gospel not record for us any further ministry by Christ to the Jewish multitude. There of course will be a few words to those who will arrest Him and again a few words to those who will later examine Him but by and large His ministry to the Jewish multitude ended with **John 12**.

Jesus will now turn His attention to His disciples, seeking to prepare them for His death, which will take place in less than twenty-four hours. This period of preparation we will call "**The Period of Conference**" (**John 13:1-17:26**). This section of Scripture begins in **John 13:1** and will go all the way down to **John 17:26**.

John begins this section with an account of Christ washing His disciples' feet. Let me read this account for you beginning at **John 13:1** and reading down to **John 13:17**. "**Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**"

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(2) And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, (4) rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. (5) Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (6) And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, 'Lord, do You wash my feet?' (7) Jesus answered and said to him, 'What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter.' (8) Peter said to Him, 'Never shall You wash my feet!' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.' (9) Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.' (10) Jesus said to him, 'He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.' (11) For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, 'Not all of you are clean.' (12) And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? (13) You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. (14) If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (16) Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. (17) If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

This of course is a very familiar passage of Scripture and a very rich passage of Scripture. What I hope will be accomplished as we work our way through this passage is that we might be able to see how Christ's unwavering and unlimited love for His disciples needs to be reflected in the disciples own relationship with one another.

So, where will we begin in seeking to accomplish this purpose? We must, first of all, look at Christ's own example. Therefore this morning we will look at the Love of Christ Exemplified (John 13:1-5).

Let us begin with **verse 1** and the very first phrase, "**Now before the feast of the Passover.**" John begins his account of the foot washing by helping us to see when this event took place in relationship to the Passover Feast. And when was that? The foot washing was before the Passover Feast, or in other words, before the Passover meal. This makes sense doesn't it? Before we eat a meal it is customary for us to wash our hands, so it should not surprise us that if someone had it in their mind to wash someone's feet it would be before the meal rather than during it or after it.

If we would therefore view the timing of this event, or in other words, the foot washing as obvious, why would John have been led by the Spirit of God to include this piece of information here within this particular account? I believe the apostle established the timing of the foot washing in relationship to the Passover meal to help his readers connect it with Christ's own climatic Passover act as the Lamb of God (John 13:1).

Let me ask you this question. If this were in fact the reason why John established the timing of this particular event and his readers did in fact make this connection would it enhance the significance of Christ's act when He washed His disciples' feet. And the answer is yes! How could it not enhance the significance? Here was Jesus, God's Passover lamb, on the eve of His death taking the time to wash His disciples' feet.

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Did He actually know when He washed His disciples' feet that He was going to be sacrificed the very next day on the cross of Calvary as God's lamb? And the answer is yes. He knew!

Look again at **John 13:1**. What does it say? "**Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come.**"

All throughout His public ministry He had indicated that His climatic hour had not yet come. But there is no doubt in **John 13:1** that as Jesus was preparing to wash His disciples' feet that He knew that His hour had come and that He would very shortly, even on the very next day, be offered up on the cross of Calvary as God's lamb.

Let me ask you another question. If this were the last day of your life, how would you like to spend it? I would doubt that many of you would say, "I would like to spend my last day on earth washing feet." But this is exactly what Christ, God's Passover Lamb, did. He chose to wash His disciples' feet even though He knew that His death was imminent. Why would John want us to know this?

John used the foot washing, with the Passover as a backdrop, to illustrate for his readers how Jesus loved His disciples to the end (John 13:1). How do we know this? How do we know that this was John's intent?

Let us continue to read **John 13:1**. "**Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**" John wants us to know that even though Jesus' hour had come and that He would very shortly depart from this world in order to return back to His Father, He loved His disciples to the end.

This is a wonderful thing for us, as the disciples of Christ, to reflect on in terms of our own lives. There is no quit in Jesus when it comes to the matter of loving us. He will love us today, He will love us tomorrow, and He will love us the day after tomorrow in any and every circumstance. He will love us. He will love us to the end.

Can we be assured of this? Of course! If Jesus, God's sacrificial lamb, was able to love His disciples while facing the prospect of death, even death on a cross, then certainly He will not have any problem loving us while He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Do we believe this? If we do, not only should our heart be filled with a wonderful sense of well-being, but our prayers should be characterized by unceasing expressions of praise, no matter what our present circumstances might be. Why? Because we know that He has loved us, that He does love us, and that He will love us. His love for His disciples certainly is not fickle and certainly Christ when He chose to wash His disciples' feet, just hours before His own crucifixion, certainly demonstrated this.

Now, just as a side note, if you have a NIV Bible, the verse does not say, "He loved them to the end," but rather it says, "He showed them the full extend of His love." Either translation is possible, but neither translation changes the bottom line.

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The bottom line is this, Jesus' love for His disciples was unlimited and unwavering right up to the very end.

So, what is the next thing that John shares with us? Let us now read **John 13:2. "And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the Son of Simon, to betray Him."**

What a stark contrast is being drawn for us in this verse between Christ and Judas.

While Christ loved His disciples to the end, Judas, harboring thoughts of betrayal, according to John 13:2, did not love Christ in a similar way. This makes Christ's unwavering and unlimited love for His disciples even that much more amazing. Not only was Jesus able to love His disciples to the end, while facing the prospect of His death on the cross of Calvary, but also He was able to love His disciples to the end, even when He knew that Judas was entertaining thoughts of betrayal.

And from where had this thought come? Satan had placed the thought of betraying Christ in the heart of Judas. Isn't this what the verse tells us? **"And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the Son of Simon, to betray Him."**

When had Satan done this? We don't know. All we know is that even before the supper began, and most likely even before the foot washing began, Judas had already begun to entertain this thought.

Can Satan plant thoughts in the hearts of people? Of course he can. Isn't this exactly what John tells us happened to Judas? Can this happen even to a disciple of Christ? And the answer is yes. This is why we must, as the disciples of Christ, be diligent in putting on the full armor of God as spelled out for us in **Ephesians 6:10-20**. If we don't do this then we can very easily be snookered by Satan into believing things and doing things that will stand in opposition to Christ and His purposes for our lives. In fact, I can guarantee to you if you don't arm yourself for the spiritual battle that every disciple of Christ faces, if you do not purpose yourself to feed upon the Word of God and to remain constant in prayer in season and out of season, you will succumb to Satan's lies, performing ungodly actions and can all the while actually think that everything is fine.

So, now where are we in this text? So far in this text we have seen how Christ, though facing His own death in **verse 1** and betrayer in **verse 2**, was able love His disciples to the end in spite of all of this.

But how could Christ hang in there with all this adversity facing Him? How could He continue to love His disciples to the end?

Let us now read **John 13:3. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God."**

Jesus was able to love His disciples to the end in spite of all His personal adversity because of the things He knew to be true (John 13:3).

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What were the things that He knew to be true that allowed Him to love His disciples to the end in spite of all His own personal adversity?

Jesus was able to love His disciples to the end in spite of all His personal adversity because He knew that His Father had given all things into His hands (John 13:3). Isn't this exactly what the verse says? How did the verse begin? "**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands.**" What does this mean?

When John tells us that Jesus knew that His Father had put all things into His hands, he is telling us that Jesus knew that He, according to the will of His Father, was sovereign in all things.

Could Jesus have avoided the cross? Absolutely! Could Jesus have smashed Satan like a bug? Absolutely! Why could Jesus hang in there and continue to love His disciples to the end even in spite of all the adversity? He could hang in there in loving His disciples in spite of all the adversity for the simple reason that He knew in His sovereignty that everything was being worked out precisely according God's eternal, unalterable, redemptive plan. What else did Jesus know that helped Him to hang in there and love His disciples to the end?

Jesus was able to love His disciples to the end in spite of all His personal adversity because He also knew that the mission He had been sent on was coming to an end (John 13:3). Let us again look at **verse 3. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God."** Jesus was near the finish line in respect to the mission that His Father had sent Him on, and He knew that. This knowledge certainly helped Him in hanging in there and certainly helped Him in loving His disciples to the end.

Jesus was facing a whole lot of adversity as we saw in **verses 1 and 2**, but in light of the things that He knew to be true in **verse 3** He was able to love His disciples to the end.

This now brings us to the very act that John chose to illustrate for his readers. We are now ready to consider the foot washing.

Let me read once again for you **John 13:3**, but this time we will add to that **verses 4 and 5. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God. (4) rose from supper [or in other words from the table that had been set for supper], and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. (5) Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded."**

Foot washing was common in the Greco-Roman and first-century Jewish culture. This was a world where roads were dusty and people's feet would become very dirty. So, how was this very common task viewed? Though the task of foot washing was common, it was considered menial. How menial was it?

The task of foot washing was so menial that, according to some Jewish sources, Jewish slaves were exempt, which left the task exclusively to gentile slaves.

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One story reports how Rabbi Ishmael returned home and his wife tried to wash his feet. He refused, claiming it was too demeaning. She took the question to a rabbinic court, arguing that it was, in fact, an honor.

In the Jewish book, *Joseph and Asenath*, Joseph's bride, Asenath, is so overcome with love for Joseph that she offers to wash his feet. When Joseph protests and sends for a servant girl, Asenath interrupts him. "No, my lord, because you are my lord, from now on I am your maidservant. For your feet are my feet and your hands are my hands... another woman will never wash your feet.

Foot washing was a degrading and lowly task. When done by a wife (for her husband), a child (for his/her parents), or a pupil (for his teacher), it was always an act of extreme devotion. But since it was an act with social implications, in no way do we find those with a "higher" status washing the feet of those beneath them. When Jesus laid aside His outer garments and wrapped around Himself in a towel to wash His disciples' feet, He was adopting the posture of a slave (Philippians 2:5-8).

This certainly should not surprise us in light of what Paul tells us about Christ in **Philippians 2:6-8**. Let me read these verses for you, Paul referring to Christ says, "**although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, (7) but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.**" Certainly Christ was not doing anything different in **John 13** than He had done from the very beginning of His earthly existence. Everything that Jesus in coming into this world was all about being a servant. Not just a servant but *the* servant, and certainly we see that again demonstrated in Christ's willingness to wash His disciples' feet.

Does Christ love us? Absolutely! And that love was exemplified for us in the way that He loved His disciples in John 13. Even though He was about to be crucified, and even though one of His own so-called disciples was about to betray Him, He was able, because of what He knew about Himself and His mission, to once again take on the form of a bond-servant by lovingly choosing to wash the feet of His disciples.

Does Christ love His disciples? Yes! Will He love His disciples to the end? Yes. Why is this important for us to know? I can't think of a thought that could impact our lives more dramatically than this thought for the simple reason that this thought and only this thought can fill us with a wonderful sense of well-being both in time and eternity no matter what might be happening around us or to us.

May God give us the grace to know that He loves us and the grace to live our lives in light of that love.