

John 13

Written by K B Napier
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Have you ever been through daunting times before a dreaded event takes place, an event that was fateful and fear-evoking to yourself? Here we read of the beginning of Jesus' final hours. He knew they were His last hours, but His apostles did not. It was still a mystery to them, so their hearts did not fail them yet. In my time, facing enemies of a daunting nature, I have had to endure their coming hatred and actions, knowing their wrath was coming, and knowing I might not survive or act well. Yet, most of the time, I have been helped by the Holy Spirit to indeed act well.

On odd occasions I failed. This is a sign not of my inability but of my 'old man' who manages somehow to lead me astray. And though I have faced my enemies head-on throughout my Christian life, the previous attacks do not really let me face the next ones with the conviction that things will be alright. But, one thing I know very well – it is better to 'go down fighting' than to hide from the battle.

Jesus is talking to His apostles about His coming death, but they were unaware of when it would be or what it would entail. And they did not even seem to understand what Jesus was really telling them. So, when the time for His demise actually came, they all ran away in fear. Think you would not? Then think again... Peter was well-intentioned, too, but his legs turned to jelly when confronted.

Verses 1-5

1.

Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2.

And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

3.

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

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4.

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

5.

After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

The first verse can be taken as an introduction and summary of Jesus' intentions. Arminians must note that He "loved His own", and this is the true meaning of John 3:16. He came solely to save 'His own' and not to 'offer' a vague salvation to all and sundry. This love He showed until He died (and in eternity).

Supper - the Passover meal - was ended. During the meal Judas determined to betray Jesus. He was said to be a thief, so we should not be surprised that he was the betrayer, who loved money more than God (if he loved Jesus to begin with).

After the meal Jesus got up and removed His outer garments, covering Himself with a large towel. He did so with absolute reasoning and God's power. He poured water into a bowl on the floor and started to wash His disciple's feet, drying them with the towel around His waist. Do you know of pastors willing to act in this lowly way? Or, do they always maintain their perceived status?

Verses 6-11

1.

Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

2.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

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3.

Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

4.

Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

5.

Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

6.

For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

When Jesus reached Simon Peter, the apostle asked if He was going to wash his feet also. Jesus told him that he would not understand Jesus' reasons until later, even though he was puzzled right now. Peter refused to let the Lord wash his feet. In reply, Jesus gave him a stark promise: 'If you do not let me do so, you have nothing to do with me!' Peter, shocked, quickly replied: 'Lord, please wash my hands and head also, not just my feet'.

In scripture, the hands represent what a man does, the head represents what he thinks. The feet represent where the man walks (his path in life). Peter realised that he needed his entire being to be cleansed by Jesus. Few modern Christians truly understand this need, because they love to live sinfully and for themselves.

Jesus told Peter that the apostles were now clean, "but not all". The cleanliness applied to the apostles, being Jesus' true followers (in today's language, they were saved, in spite of their ignorance); 'but not all' refers to Judas, who was not saved or truly a follower. This is confirmed by verse 11. Sadly, many who call themselves 'Christians' today are followers of Judas Iscariot, not Christ.

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Verses 11-20

1.

So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

2.

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

3.

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

4.

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

5.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.

6.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

7.

I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

8.

Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

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9.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Jesus washed the feet of all His apostles, put His outer garment back on, and then sat down. He then asked them if they knew why He had washed their feet. Before anyone could answer Jesus said that they called Him Master and Lord, and this was acceptable, because that is Who He was.

He then told them why he washed their feet: If their Lord and Master could humbly lower Himself, then so should they before each other. The washing of feet in the text is symbolic rather than a command for us today. It means that every Christian should view every other Christian as more worthy than themselves, and should serve them humbly. This is a particular command for pastors and preachers, who are not greater than those they help and teach, and have no higher status.

Jesus said He washed their feet as an example of how to treat each other. Do Christians act this way? Are they humble? Do they look out for your welfare? Do they thank God if He calls upon them to help other believers? Are pastors humble enough to be servant to their local churches, expecting no greater reward than anyone else?

After all, said Jesus, the servant is not greater or more important than his lord. Similarly, Jesus was the servant of the Father Who sent Him. For us this is a mystery, for Jesus Christ was Himself God, co-equal with the Father. Jesus told them that they would only be happy if they copied this example of humility. This is true throughout life – when we are godly and love our brethren, caring for their welfare, our lives are joyful.

Jesus then hinted at something wrong – He was not speaking about every apostle, because, as prophecy said, one of those in His midst would deal treacherously with Him. Jesus even said that the evil person would eat bread with Him. Yet, the apostles did not know who this would be.

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Jesus said that He was telling this so that when the treachery came, they would believe Him. That is, He was God and so knew in advance, though to them it came as prophecy.

Verses 21-27

1.

When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

2.

Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.

3.

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

4.

Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.

5.

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?

6.

Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

7.

And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.

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After saying this, Jesus was troubled in spirit. He then said that one of them would betray Him. What this shows is that those Christians who claim always to know who is genuine, are sometimes mistaken or deceived, and can even begin to believe in heresy. Or, they might completely miss the signs of evil in someone they trusted.

The apostles looked at each other, wondering who could do such an awful thing. And, at that moment even Judas did not know it was he! So, they all looked at each other, mulling over Jesus' words.

John, the disciple "whom Jesus loved", leant on Jesus' chest, as one did in those days at a meal if he had deep regard for someone. Because he was so close to Jesus, Peter asked John to ask Jesus who the betrayer would be. So, John asked who the betrayer was. Jesus did not give a direct answer, for the apostles would have set upon Judas, thus preventing him from fulfilling prophecy. Jesus told them that the betrayer would receive a sop (bread or bit of meat dipped in the liquid part of the meal). Jesus then dipped the sop and handed it to Judas.

Interestingly, none of the apostles seem to have noticed this, as we see in verse 28. It was not until Judas accepted the sop that Satan entered him, leading him to think treacherously about Jesus. (It had to be Satan himself, rather than one of his minion demons: the task was too important to leave it to anyone other than the arch-enemy of God). It is possible that he had thought of it previously, but did not act upon his thoughts until now. Jesus knew what had happened and whispered to Judas that he should go and do what he had to do, quickly.

We can see that even though he was with Jesus for three years, Judas did not seem to be hampered by conscience. Many today are similarly arrogant about their heresy or waywardness. And the same evil is within them – Satan. Christians must never give quarter to such doctrinal and behavioural deviants. As I keep saying, we have no right to sympathise with things God hates.

Verses 28-32

1.

Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him.

2.

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For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.

3.

He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.

4.

Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

5.

If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.

Though all were around the same table, and they heard the words, no-one understood why Jesus said what He said to Judas. This can only be because Jesus alone knew, because He is God. Jesus did not detail what He said, so as not to arouse the suspicions of the rest of the apostles, who would have stopped Judas from going to the Pharisees.

The apostles only heard Jesus tell Judas to go about his business. They knew he was the treasurer and assumed that it had something to do with the money; perhaps he had to pay for goods used at the feast, or to give to the poor. Judas accepted the sop and immediately got up and went out. It is surely amazing that this man *KNEW* *Jesus* knew what he was going to do, and yet he did it anyway.

Is this not like so many of us? We *KNOW* something is hated by God and yet we do it nevertheless, ignoring the fact that the Holy Spirit is our witness 24 hours a day! This shows us how potent sin can be, and how lax we are in being holy. "and it was night"; an appropriate time to go out, for darkness is symbolic of sin.

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After Judas left, Jesus proclaimed that the Son of man and God were now glorified. The apostles must have been mystified by His words, for they knew nothing of Judas' treachery. They did not know that Judas' evil work was exactly the 'switch' that illuminated God's eternal plan to save those who were elect! The plan was now in full operation, whether or not they understood Jesus' words.

The lack of understanding increased when Jesus said that when the Son was glorified, so was the Father, Who immediately glorified the Son. 'God' in this text is *theos* – the trinity.

Verses 33-38

1.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you.

2.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

3.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

4.

Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

5.

Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.

6.

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.

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Jesus then addressed the apostles with the words “Little children”, *teknion*, as a term of endearment. This is because they were His spiritual children, those on whose shoulders rested the spreading of the Gospel (though even this they did not know yet), and because to this moment they were as tender and unknowing as children, yet trusting.

He told them He would only be with them for a short while longer. After that they could not follow Him and would wonder where He was. For this reason they had to rely on each other (in the Lord). So, He gave them a brand new commandment, to love each other. This is an echo of the words expressed by the Jews after Jesus’ death, when they observed that Christians loved each other. And they should do so, because Jesus first loved them. How can we view the lack of love shown towards fellow believers by Christians today? Can it be they are fake? Or, they sin?

At the very least, their lack of love (the verb *agapaō*, not the noun *agape*, but both point to a brand new concept that mimics the love of the Father to His Son and their true nature. So, this love cannot have higher connections and connotations) proves sin to be an impediment in their spiritual lives. It is sin because they ignore Jesus’ new command. And how sad that sin is, for it is fundamental to a proper obedience to God’s laws and commands, which are to be applied to all men, not just fellow believers who we like. When used of God,

agapaō

shows the unerring love of God towards totally untrustworthy subjects, unmerited and faulty though they are.

Sadly, modern Christians throw about the words *agape* and *agapaō* with loose abandon, as if they were fashion accessories. There is no reality behind them, and their use is entirely superficial and fashionable, with no depth of understanding or use. Their meanings run deeper than the mere emotions and superficiality so often expressed, mainly by charismatics, whose glazed eyed ‘adoration’ is more cultic than real. Their glazed appearance is symbolic of their superficiality, which literally glosses over the truth with their raised hands and unseeing eyes, as they chant their mantra.

True love as shown here is above human emotions and natural inclinations, and so is purer and more holy. And it is by showing this love that Christians prove their love for God (verse 35). And ALL men, whether saved or not, will see this love, and reluctantly attribute it to God. Do they

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see it today? I do not think so.

When He had finished speaking, Peter asked Him where He was going. Jesus was just as mysterious in His answer: that where He was going Peter could not yet follow – but he would later. This was a prophecy of Peter's own death for following Jesus, though Peter did not yet realise what Jesus meant. Note that these words do not necessarily mean Peter would be crucified like Jesus (though it is a popular legend), only that Peter would die for his faith and obedience to Jesus.

Peter, rash as ever, promised that he would follow Jesus no matter what happened (do not we all speak so rashly, without counting the cost?). He wanted to know why he could not follow, as he would gladly lay down his life for Jesus. Jesus queried Peter's zeal and gave him devastating news – that he would deny Him three times during His long night of physical abuse, even before the cock crowed before dawn. Jesus, though, did not elaborate on the coming events.

Peter must have been hurt badly by this statement, because his desire to die for Jesus was well-meant. He did not know that his zeal would give way to fear, so that he could escape the same fate known to Jesus. None of us can truly know what we would do in such awful moments. We HOPE we will act with staunch resolve, but none of us can know our true reactions until the moment arrives.

Even though I am an 'old war horse' who has been faced with dangers, accusations and physical attack time and again, I would not dare to presume my 'holy heroism' in the face of the next evil attack! And perhaps that is a blessing from God. Jesus did not elaborate to Peter, probably so as not to knock his faith too much... Peter had to suffer his own denials as a prelude to his later firm resolve. Do not look forward to the next battle, but just be prepared and pray you will be faithful.

Note: Some ask if Judas Iscariot was saved. From this chapter we see that he was not, and there are several clues to this: verses 2 (Satan cannot enter a saved man), 10 (all were clean – acceptable to God, but not Judas), 18 (Jesus did not include Judas as one of the chosen), 21 (Judas would betray Him), 27 (Satan entered Judas, but he cannot enter someone who is saved).

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