

## “Handling Power” John 13:1-17

### I. INTRODUCTION Read vs. 1-5

### II. TEXT

#### A. Vs. 1-5

**<sup>1</sup> Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.**

1. This marks a major turning point in Jesus’ ministry.
2. He’s done with the crowds. From now on He reserves His time & teaching for the disciples.
3. His emphasis is *the primacy of love*.
4. But His instruction won’t come through words only; He teaches by example; & here John says that Jesus goes ALL THE WAY in demonstrating His love.

**<sup>2</sup> And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup> After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.**

5. Jesus knew exactly what time it was & that the cross was just hours away.
  - a. He knew about Judas’ plan to betray him.
  - b. The wheels of the plot to get rid of Him were already turning.
  - c. What *Judas & the priests* didn’t know was that there was a higher plot unfolding – it was God’s plan to redeem the Earth & reclaim from Satan what had been lost in the Fall.
  - d. It was for this hour Jesus had come.
6. Look at v. 3 again –

**Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God . . .**

- a. We can’t go further without pausing to mark how *wild* this verse is.
- b. For generations, philosophers have identified 3 great questions:  
*Where did I come from? / Why am I here? / Where am I going?*
- c. Or to sum them all up in one Supreme Question = ***Who am I?***

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- d. John says Jesus KNEW the answers.
- e. Everything was crystal clear; He knew precisely Who He was as God & Man.
  - 1) He was the Messiah, the Redeemer, the Savior.
  - 2) He knew He was the Eternal Son who’d become human so that He could restore fallen humanity to its original destiny.
  - 3) And He knew that soon He would be *returning* to the glory of heaven, His mission on Earth complete.

7. And *with* this awareness of *Who* He was came the knowledge He possessed ***all power & authority***.
8. Before we move on, I need to make sure we're all on the same page here.
 

Jesus knew exactly Who He was,  
& that He possessed **BOTH** unlimited power,  
& the right to use it!
9. Up till Mel Gibson made *The Passion of the Christ* recent Hollywood movies tended to portray Jesus as a ***tortured*** soul who was little more than a good but misunderstood religious reformer.
  - a. Movies & books depicted him as ***worried*** if people liked Him,
  - b. Confused about His mission; even doubting if He was doing the right thing.
10. That Hollywood image of Jesus is ***destroyed*** by what we find here.
11. Jesus knew exactly Who He was & the power He possessed.
  - a. So, what the world has taught us to expect—what a Hollywood screenwriter would portray ***in light of v. 3*** would go something like this . . .

**<sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, <sup>4</sup> rose from supper – the heavens were opened, and a multitude of angels was heard singing, “Glory to God in the Highest, and to His Beloved Son on Earth.” Then two angels with countenance like the sun placed a golden robe upon His shoulders. Another placed a jeweled crown upon His head. A third handed Him a golden scepter. Then a voice as the sound of many waters was heard from heaven saying, “Bow down and kiss the feet of Him who rules forever & ever.”**

- b. If they made a movie, they'd cast today's hottest hottie in the role of Jesus.
- c. And they'd spend millions of dollars on special effects to surround him with the glory that would be fitting for this moment of supreme power.
12. No really – if we didn't know what was coming, if we'd never heard this story & knew nothing of the gospel, when we read Jesus knew all things had been put in His hands, we'd expect Him to rise from the table & demand their worship.
  - a. Then He'd go forth from that room to deal with all those who stood in the way of what He wanted to do.
  - b. He'd crush Judas. He'd visit the high priest's house and squish him like a bug. Then He'd go on over to the house of the Roman governor and pay him a visit.
  - c. After all, what good is power if you don't use it?
13. The reason we'd expect all this is because it's exactly what the world does with power – it's what ***we've*** been taught to do with it.
  - a. If you have power, you ***use*** it to get ***what you want***.
  - b. And if you ***lack*** the power to get what you want, then you work to ***get*** it.
14. So it comes as a shock to see what Jesus does with the unlimited power & authority He possesses.

**<sup>4</sup> [He] rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. <sup>5</sup> After that, He poured water into a basin and began to**

**wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded.**

15. As the host & their leader, when Jesus rose, all eyes would have been on him.
  - a. He undid the sash & took off his robe & the thin shirt underneath it.
  - b. This left Him in just a sheet wrapped around His waist & upper legs.
  - c. He took one of the large towels that were lying around the room the disciples had used as napkins. He wrapped this around His waist.
  - d. Then, He took one a basin, poured water into it, & knelt at the feet of John.
  - e. One at a time, He lifted his feet, put them over the basin, poured water over them and rubbed the dirt away. With a rinse & a wipe from the towel at his waist, He moved to the next foot.
  - f. Then he moved to Judas, & one by one around the table until he came to the last – Peter.

**B. Vs. 6-11**

**6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?”**

1. Peter was flabbergasted! The idea that their Rabbi would perform this humble task was deeply troubling to him.
2. You see, washing someone's feet was considered *so degrading* it was left for the *lowest slave*.
  - a. It was usually performed by a young child who because of age & strength could do little else.
  - b. Hebrew slaves were *exempt* from washing feet because it was considered a humiliating task.
  - c. Foot-washer was the bottom rung in the hierarchy of servants.
  - d. Plus, it was just a nasty job.
    - 1) The roads were dirt and were often muddy.
    - 2) People tossed their sewage, including their bedpans onto the streets.
    - 3) Just the process of walking around saw your feet become spattered & slathered with all kinds of gunk.
  - e. When you entered a house, you took your sandals off at the front door & stepped into a small entry where the foot-washer sat on a small stool.
  - f. He poured water over your feet, then either used a brush or their hands to remove the nasties from the tops, sides, bottoms of the feet & between the toes.
  - g. No one aspired to be a foot-washer. On the contrary, foot-washers eagerly awaited promotion out of their role.
3. And this is why the disciples hadn't washed their feet when they came in.
  - a. The ones who'd been sent ahead to make ready the room had neglected to make arrangements for it,
  - b. And once the others arrived, none of them was about to offer to wash feet because it would have been humiliating to do so.
  - c. In homes that had *no* servants, each washed their *own* feet.
  - d. So why didn't the disciple wash their *own feet* when they entered?
  - e. Each knew if he did, the others would come & stick their feet out, expecting them to be washed as well.

- f. So they'd all played a kind of "foot-wash chicken" & hadn't done *anything*.
- g. They parked at the table with dirty, stinky, sewage-caked feet; miserable but with their dignity intact because no one had blinked and given in.
- 4. When Jesus donned the attire of a lowly servant, took the basin & knelt at their feet, it had been a moment of major embarrassment.
  - a. Here He was – their Rabbi; the One they've come to pin their hopes on as the Messiah, the King of Israel.
  - b. But He's performing a task that was about as opposite from that as possible.
- 5. John records not a word from the embarrassed disciples until Jesus gets to Peter, who expresses his dismay that Jesus would lower Himself so.

**7 Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."**

- 6. This gives us an all-important insight in how we're to understand the lesson behind the washing of their feet.
  - a. Jesus answered Peter's surprise with a promise that the meaning behind what He's doing was at present a mystery, but one that will soon become clear to them.
  - b. This was an *acted parable*.
    - 1) Jesus could have stayed seated & told them a *story* about a rabbi who washed his disciples' feet.
    - 2) But the *lesson* they had to learn could only be imparted by deeds not words alone.
  - c. The washing of their feet foreshadowed the cross.
  - d. Jesus, their Master, their Lord, was about to perform an act of service for them that was *so humiliating* it made foot-washing look *noble* in comparison.
- 7. While Jesus still had this private, personal time with them, He wanted to make sure they would understand that the cross was FOR THEM!
- 8. It's the reason He came. It's why He was Who He was & why He possessed all power & authority.
- 9. It was all so He could *serve* them & bring about their salvation.
- 10. But as Jesus said, they would only understand later – on the other side of the cross. And because of that . . .

**8 Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"**

- 11. Peter isn't saying this because he was *ticklish*.
  - a. He wouldn't let his feet be washed because he wouldn't see Jesus debase Himself by this humble service.
  - b. In Peter's world, rabbis *do not* wash their disciples' feet!
  - c. Because in Peter's world washing feet is nothing more than a social custom.

**Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me."**

- 12. Jesus made it clear what He was doing wasn't merely a social courtesy.
  - a. By washing their feet He *wasn't rebuking* them for their lack of humility in refusing to take care of each other.
  - b. What Jesus says here proves that the washing of their feet *pointed to the*

*cross.*

- c. **Both** were humble acts of service that pointed them to the true nature of His mission as the Messiah.
  - d. He hadn't come to *be served*, but to *serve*.
13. Listen to how Paul describes the Incarnation in Phil. 2.
- <sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be selfishly held on to, <sup>7</sup> but He emptied Himself, and took on the identity of a bondservant, coming in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> Then being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient even to *the point of death on the cross*.**
14. In the Incarnation, God did not *become* a servant. Rather, the Incarnation **REVEALS** God as a Servant!
15. When Jesus said to Peter, **“If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me”** He was saying that in order to belong to Him we must *let Him serve us* through the cross.
16. Realizing that Jesus has some deeper purpose for the washing of his feet than just a custom . . .
- <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” <sup>11</sup> For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”**
17. This exchange between Peter & Jesus is something we'll look at *next* Sunday. It reveals something vital about our walk with the Lord we need to spend some time on so we'll come back to it next week.
18. For now, notice that Jesus knew one of the disciples was a fraud = Judas.
- a. This humble act of service Jesus had just performed had left a bitter taste in his mouth.
  - b. Judas followed Jesus for the *goodies* it would get him, for the promotions & advancement it meant.
  - c. He had no interest in following a guy Who'd embarrass Himself by such a humiliating act as washing feet.

### C. Vs. 12-16

**<sup>12</sup> So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.**

1. After this *utterly surprising* thing He's just done, Jesus returns to something

*totally familiar* – the goal of a disciple.

2. It's familiar to you too – say it real loud – What's the goal of a disciple?  
TO BE JUST LIKE THE RABBI !

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3. Luke tells us that during dinner, the disciples returned to a debate that had been a long running argument among them –which of them was the greatest. [Luke 22:24]
  - a. They were 12 Mohammed Ali's all contending for #1 – “I am the greatest!”
  - b. Jesus *corrected* them through this example of humble service.
  - c. Following Him means, not rising over others but lowering one's self to serve.
4. And this is why John *sets up the story* of Jesus washing their feet by saying that His hour had come, He knew who He was and that all things had been given to Him.
5. *The whole point* is that for the Christian, power is given for *one thing* –  
To serve others!

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Servants Serve

1. God gives power *for service*, not so we could *promote ourselves*.
2. The history of the Church is a long sad tale of the *misuse* of power.
  - a. God's *anointing* has been prostituted & made the means of worldly fame.
  - b. His *calling* has been turned into a mask for personal gain.
  - c. All too often men & women have twisted the power of God into a stick to control their followers with.
3. It's difficult to understand how this happens when the lesson here is so clear:  
God gives power that we might *serve one another*.

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4. The goal of the disciple is to be just like the rabbi. That means as disciples we are called to BE SERVANTS too!
5. Christian – don't just see in this passage *a call to serve*.
  - a. It's much deeper & more important than that.
  - b. We aren't called to serve so much as to BE SERVANTS.
  - c. And what do servants do? Serve!
  - d. I like the way Gail Erwin defines the servant's job description, the servant is there to make life *better* for others.
  - e. We aren't called to serve; We're called to BE SERVANTS.
  - f. That's the *identity* we must embrace.
6. If all we do is serve, we'll put *limits* on our service. We'll only serve when it's convenient or there's a reward.
  - a. When those we serve aren't appreciative, we get upset.
  - b. “Burn out” is the result of service on *our* terms.
9. *Being a servant* means seeing things completely differently.
  - a. Servants *look* for opportunities to serve because that's what they are.
  - b. They don't expect thanks because they don't consider their service anything other than what's normal, what's expected.
  - c. They don't burn out because the service they render isn't seen as service; it's *life*.

10. The difference between serving & being a servant is best summed up by the “I” test.
  - a. If we understand what Jesus says here as a call to serve, then we find ourselves asking such questions as . . .
    - Where & how can **I** serve?
    - What’s there for **ME** to do?
    - What role can **I** play?
  - b. But if we follow Jesus’ example & embrace our *identity as servants*, “I” drops out of the equation & service *replaces* the questions.
  - c. Servants don’t have time to ask where they can serve; they’re busy serving.
  - d. Their eyes & ears recognize need & they just move *without prodding* to help.
11. A waitress is assigned certain tables in a restaurant.
  - a. When a party sits down, she doesn’t stand by the kitchen & ask herself if she should take their order.
  - b. She’s a waitress – that’s her table – those are her customers. It’s her *job* to serve them.
12. We are the waiters & waitresses of Jesus Christ & this world is His restaurant. Here’s the menu. Let’s *do* what we *are*.

### **B. How?**

1. How? Do we take Jesus literally here in v. 14 & wash feet?
2. There have been those throughout history who’ve turned foot washing into a sacrament.
3. But that is NOT the way we ought to understand the Lord here.
4. He met their *need* that night, which was to have their feet washed, just as He would later meet their *deeper* need at the cross.
5. The servant’s goal is to make the life of others better.
6. Therefore, our service ought to seek to meet some *real need*.
7. Here were the tools of service Jesus used that night.
8. Here are the tools of service we might use today -

### **C. How To Be Happy**

**17** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

1. Some scholars translate “blessed” as “happy” because it best catches the *flavor* of the word.
2. This lesson on being a servant isn’t one we’re to file away in our heads.
3. The route to the life *God created us* for lies through being a servant.
4. The world thinks happiness comes with possessions, position, & power.
  - a. If that were the case, Americans ought to be the happiest people on earth.
  - b. an epidemic of drugs, suicide, depression, & divorce ought to prove the world’s got it all wrong.
5. Want to be happy? **Be a servant.**