

The Upper Room Discourse

Chapter Two

John 13:1-17

Knowing Who You Are

Knowing who you are is critically important in knowing how to live. Knowing your identity, who you really are, helps in determining how you think, feel and behave. In John 13 before Jesus washes the disciples' feet we are presented with a contrast between Jesus and Judas.

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.

² And supper being ended¹, the devil having already put it 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 had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.
(John 13:1-4)

Jesus will soon wash the disciples' feet motivated by his identity as the Son of God. Judas is motivated by the Devil. When did this happen to Judas? It occurred a few days earlier after a dinner at the home of a man named Simon, who had been a leper. A woman came to Jesus and poured out very expensive perfume on his head. The disciples were angry about this and said the perfume could have been sold and the money used to help the poor.² But the Lord said

¹ This phrase "supper being ended" should read "as supper commenced" or "during supper."

² Matthew 26:6-16

the woman had anointed him for his burial. It was right after this incident according to Luke, that Judas was influenced by Satan to betray Jesus.³

Now, we can't miss the point that John is making. Jesus knew who he was. He was the unique Son of God. He was the promised Messiah. He will be the full and final sacrifice for sins. He will be the King of kings. He knew that God had put all things into his hands. This speaks of power and authority. He knew he came from God in the sense that God had commissioned him⁴. And he knew that he was going to God. Yet Jesus will humble himself and wash feet.

Judas built his identity not on the Word of God, but from the world around him. Therefore Satan had an easy target and Judas became a traitor. Jesus lived a righteous life and endured suffering and the cross, because his identity was rooted in Scripture. Like our Lord we can live righteous lives and endure whatever trial we may face if we have a biblical identity. Let me show this to you from 1 Peter.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the pilgrims of the Dispersion
in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,
Asia, and Bithynia, ² elect according
to the foreknowledge of God the
Father, in sanctification of the Spirit,
for obedience and sprinkling of the
blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you
and peace be multiplied.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of
our Lord Jesus Christ, who according
to His abundant mercy has begotten
us again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the
dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible
and undefiled and that does not fade
away, reserved in heaven for you,
⁵ who are kept by the power of God
through faith for salvation ready to be

³ Luke 22:3

⁴ Jesus did not exist before his birth. In John 1:6 speaking of John the Baptist we read "There was a man sent from God." John did not actually come out from heaven. He was sent or commissioned by God for his ministry. The same is true for Jesus Christ. In James 1:17 we read, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." This is a figure of speech. Every good gift does not literally come down from heaven. The idea presented is that these good gifts are given by the influence of God upon the giver.

revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:1-5)

In these verses the Word of God is building an identity for us. First we are the elect according to the foreknowledge of God. We belong to God. We are His people. He has set His love and grace upon us. Secondly, we have been sanctified by God's Spirit. We have been set apart as children of God. We no longer belong to this world. Thirdly, we are called to obedience. We are no longer servants of sin, but followers and imitators of Christ. Fourthly, we are under the sprinkling of blood, which means that we are in an everlasting covenant with God and Christ; they will always be faithful to us. And finally fifthly, we are born again to a living hope of everlasting life and glory. This is who I am and who you are! Now, let's read verse 6a.

In this you greatly rejoice
(1 Peter 6a)

You cannot rejoice in who you are and what you have unless you know these truths. So you must know the Scriptures. And knowing your identity will enable you to endure and overcome the trials of life. Peter continues,

In this you greatly rejoice, though
now for a little while, if need be,
you have been grieved by various
trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your
faith, *being* much more precious than
gold that perishes, though it is tested
by fire, may be found to praise, honor,
and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,
⁸ whom having not seen you love.
Though now you do not see *Him*, yet
believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible
and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your
faith—the salvation of *your* souls.
(1 Peter 1:6-9)

Knowing who you are biblically helps you to trust God in tough times. And so it is so very important for us as believers to develop our identity from Scripture. As I said before, knowing who you are will determine how you think, feel and behave. In good times our God-given identity will give our lives meaning, purpose and joy. And when we face troubles or needs at work or at home or wherever, your biblical identity will give you the strength and courage to do what needs to be done. Christ's identity enabled him to love his disciples and wash their feet. Let's return to John.

And [during supper] the devil having already put it 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 had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. ⁵ 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.
(John 13:2-5)

In true humility, setting aside his position and authority, Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet to demonstrate His deep love for them that they might be secure in it. It is the nature of love to be self-less, sacrificial and self-giving. I love the image John gives to us. In quiet confidence Jesus stood up from the table, put a towel around his waist and filled a basin with water. He then knelt down and began to wash feet.

Can you imagine the emotions that must have shot through the disciples' hearts? What was Jesus doing? A Master or Teacher should never wash anyone's feet! That's the work of a slave. It was undignified, it was shameful, it was just wrong. No one said anything of course; they were all too polite and stunned. But Peter is just appalled and says what everyone else is thinking.

Then He came to Simon Peter.
And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?"
⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." ⁸ Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!"
(John 13:6-8a)

As Peter said this you can almost see him pulling back his feet. How could a king wash someone's feet? And so Peter declared "You shall never wash my feet!" To emphasize the force of Peter's words John used the strongest negative in the Greek language. It is *ou me* a compound word meaning "no, never, no." I am sure that Peter thought he was acting properly and humbly. But Jesus did

not just take on a menial task, because no one else did. He is going to teach great spiritual truths.

Peter said to Him, "You shall never 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!"

(John 13:8, 9)

Here is typical Peter going from one extreme to another. No one ever imagined the Messiah as a foot washing slave. Peter doesn't fully understand, but he loves the Lord and does not want to be without him. And Jesus will now take this opportunity of Peter asking for a shower to teach a truth about salvation from sin.

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." ¹¹ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."
(John 13:10, 11)

In these words our Lord gives us a beautiful picture of salvation. It begins with a spiritual bath or washing. When you come to God by faith in Christ you are washed clean of all of your sins. In Titus 3 the apostle Paul says that we are saved by "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." This is a one time, irreversible work. There is no need to repeat it. Once you are clean you are ready for the kingdom.

But there is more here and Jesus uses a social custom of the time to explain it. It was the custom to take a bath before you went to dinner at someone's home. But while walking through the dusty or muddy streets with only sandals, your feet would get dirty. Therefore when you arrived a servant would wash your feet. But you would not need to repeat the bath.

So Jesus is saying when you come to me by faith you are bathed, cleansed from all of your sins. You are justified.⁵ But as we go through life we are

⁵ Romans 5:1

going to sin. And to have sweet fellowship with God and Christ we will need to have our feet washed. This is why 1 John 1:9 states, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But once you are saved, you are saved. Once you are clean, you are clean. Jesus knew that all the disciples were saved except Judas.

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." ¹¹ For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are not all clean."
(John 13:10, 11)

If Judas had any spiritual understanding Christ's words should have cut him to his heart. But Judas' heart is too full of worldly thinking. Now comes an exhortation to imitate Christ.

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? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."
(John 13:12-17)

In these verses our Lord explains what he has done and how it applies to us. And he begins with his authority. He said I am your teacher and Lord. I have the right to instruct you and to command you. So if I, with power and authority have washed your feet, you are to wash one another's feet.

Some people think that Jesus meant this literally and have made it a church ceremony. But Jesus is telling us to recognize who we are as believers. We have been given great blessings and privileges. And like our Lord we are to take a step back in humility and instead of demanding to be served, we are to

serve one another. This washing of the disciples' feet was not only symbolic of service; it symbolized restoring believers who have sinned. Galatians 6:1 says,

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness

And so, when we go to wash a brother's or sister's feet or when someone comes to wash our feet to bring us back from sin, let's be careful about the temperature of the water! We don't want to go to someone so mad and angry that we bring boiling water. And we don't want to be so self-righteous and "holier-than-thou" that we bring frigid, freezing water. Psalm 119:9 tells us, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." So we want to gently apply the Word to our brothers and sisters.

Our Lord ends his foot washing by saying "If you know these things blessed [or happy] are you if you do this." Everyone wants to be happy. Jesus said if we understand that our lives should match his, then that is what we should strive for to be happy. Jesus took on a servant's role, because he knew who he was. And what was proper for Jesus is proper for us. So, let's pick our towel and basin and go to work.