

JOHN 13

John 13:1–17. Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet

We can read verse 1 as a thematic statement that explains the trajectory of the second (and final) section of the Gospel of John, which begins here. Every action that Jesus takes—washing the feet, giving the farewell discourse, praying for His disciples, and finally laying down His life—is motivated by His love. This is true, of course, of Jesus’s actions before His final night, but the Evangelist wants to emphasize this point particularly in Jesus’s death.

Verse 4 provides a powerful metaphor for Jesus’s coming sacrifice; the words for “laid aside” and “took” (Greek *tithēmi* and *lambanō*, respectively) are the same used in John 10:17–18: “I lay down my life, that I might take it again.” The foot washing represents Jesus’s love and humble sacrifice in dying on behalf of humankind. The ordinance also has significance related to hospitality and ritual washing. The Apostles do not catch the double meaning in Jesus’s words in verse 10; they take “ye are clean, but not all” to mean that their feet are clean, but not the rest of their bodies, whereas Jesus means that they—except for one man, Judas—are clean (see verse 11).

John 13:18–30. Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

Verse 18 makes it clear that Jesus’s calling of Judas was not a mistake. Presumably, Judas had the same opportunity for discipleship as the other eleven, but his own actions, foreseen by Jesus, led him down the path of betrayal. Verse 19 echoes Isaiah 48:5 (“I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee”) and 43:10 (“That ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he”), explaining that Jehovah has revealed the future so that the believers may have confidence in Him.

However, Jesus's outright declaration in verse 21 surprises the Twelve. Peter, shocked and impatient, tries to ascertain the betrayer's identity by asking the disciple closest to Jesus. This is the first time that the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (often assumed to be the author of John) is mentioned, but he will appear five more times before the Gospel ends. The signal that Jesus gives is unmistakable; however, it seems that only these two disciples were aware of its significance since the rest do not understand why Judas suddenly leaves ("no man" obviously excludes Jesus and probably Peter and the other disciple).

John 13:31–35. Love One Another

Because *glorification* in the Gospel of John is always connected with Jesus's death, Resurrection, and Ascension, verses 31–32 must be understood in this context. The idea seems to be that Jesus reveals His glory through His death, and this glory points toward the Father's own since it is a reflection of it. In light of His coming departure, the final commandment, "Love one another," is all the more significant. The Evangelist has prefaced this final section of the Gospel with the reminder that Jesus "loved [His own] unto the end," and here, Jesus's love is also the motivating factor. The disciples are to love one another in the same unconditional manner that Jesus loved them; there is even a hint in the Greek *hina* ("that") that it is Jesus's love that makes love of others possible. This is certainly true: the love shown by Jesus in His self-sacrifice increases our capacity to love others through the enabling power of the Atonement.

John 13:36–38. Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

Peter, distressed by Jesus's announcement that He is leaving, has missed the commandment about love. His only concern is losing Jesus, but his energy is misguided. Eventually, he will follow Jesus to martyrdom, but this will be long afterwards, with many decades of faithful service in between. He does not yet know the tremendous cross he must bear, nor is he ready to shoulder the full load of discipleship. Thus, Jesus knowingly corrects his misplaced confidence: when the moment of decision comes, Peter will not yet be willing to lay down his life for Jesus's sake.

In a noncanonical but striking scene found in the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* (probably late second century), Peter is fleeing his imminent martyrdom in Rome. While on the journey, he encounters Jesus and asks the same question: "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus responds that He is going to Rome to be crucified again, this time in the place of Peter. Shocked by this cutting response, Peter steels his resolve and returns to Rome, fulfilling his prophesied responsibility as a martyr for the cause.

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