

The Life of Christ

Lesson 11: The Triumphal Entry and the Upper Room -- John 13:1-17

Days earlier, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey while crowds spread their cloaks on the road and waved palm branches and shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" It looked like a coronation. The King had come to His city. But the kind of king He was, and the kind of throne He was heading toward, would surprise everyone. By the time we reach the upper room, the palm branches are gone, the crowds have thinned, and Jesus gathers in a quiet room with the twelve men closest to Him, on the last night before His death.

John sets the scene with tender weight. Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father. He knew the cross was hours away. And John tells us that, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." With everything bearing down on Him, His thoughts were not on Himself but on them. The love that had called them, taught them, and borne with them did not waver as the darkness gathered. It went all the way to the end.

Then He did something no one expected. In that room, with no servant present to perform the lowly task, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, rose from supper, took off His outer garment, wrapped a towel around His waist, and knelt to wash His disciples' feet. This was the work of the lowest household servant, washing the road grime and worse from travelers' feet. And the Lord of glory, the King who had ridden into Jerusalem, knelt on the floor before fishermen and a tax collector and even the man who would betray Him, and washed their feet one by one.

Peter recoiled. "Lord, do you wash my feet? You shall never wash my feet." But Jesus answered, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." There is something here far deeper than clean feet. The kneeling Servant is pointing past the basin to a cross, where He would cleanse them at the cost of His own blood. And when He finished, He said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you." This lesson kneels with Jesus in the upper room, to learn the love that serves to the end, the cleansing that only He can give, and the towel He hands to everyone who would follow Him.

Group Discussion: On the last night before His death, with the cross hours away, Jesus spent His time washing His disciples' feet rather than being served. What does it tell us about the heart of God that the King of glory chose to take the place of the lowest servant, and why is that so hard for us to imitate?

Personal Reflection: Jesus "loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Where do you struggle to believe that Christ loves you all the way to the end, even knowing your failures, and how would resting in that love free you to serve others?

Read John 13:1-17

Study Questions

1. John writes that Jesus, knowing His hour had come, “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (v. 1). What does this reveal about the depth and steadfastness of Christ’s love, especially as He faced the cross?
2. Jesus loved His disciples to the end, even knowing their coming failures, including Peter’s denial and Judas’ betrayal. Where do you find it hard to believe that Christ loves you steadfastly, and how would truly resting in that love change you?
3. In verse 3, John notes that Jesus knew the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come from God, and it was precisely then that He rose to wash feet. What does it reveal about Jesus that He expressed His divine authority not by being served but by stooping to serve?
4. The world measures greatness by status, power, and being served. Where are you tempted to grasp for recognition or to avoid lowly, hidden service, and whose feet, figuratively, are you most reluctant to wash?
5. When Peter protested, Jesus said, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me” (v. 8). What does this teach about the necessity of the cleansing that Christ alone provides, and how does the foot washing point beyond itself to a deeper washing?

6. Peter first refused to let Jesus wash him, recoiling from being served. Where does pride make it hard for you to receive grace, to admit your need, and to let Christ cleanse and serve you rather than earning your own way?
7. After washing their feet, Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (vv. 14–15). What does Jesus call His followers to do, and what does humble, mutual service look like in the life of His church?
8. Consider your own willingness to serve in lowly, unnoticed ways. What is one humble act of service you tend to avoid or feel is beneath you, and how does the example of Christ confront that reluctance?
9. The humble service of Jesus in the upper room flows from, and points toward, the cross He was about to bear, where He would cleanse His people at the cost of His own blood (compare Philippians 2:5–8; Mark 10:45; 1 John 1:7). How does the foot washing reveal that Christ's servanthood is far more than a moral example, and how is the cleansing He offers grounded in His atoning death rather than in our own efforts?
10. Jesus said, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (v. 17). Looking back over the love that serves to the end and the cleansing Christ alone provides, name one specific act of humble, Christlike love you will carry out this week as one who has been washed by Him.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 2:5–8, where Christ, though equal with God, humbled Himself and took the form of a servant; Mark 10:42–45, where Jesus says He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom; John 13:34–35, the new commandment to love one another as the mark of His disciples; 1 John 1:7, where the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin; Galatians 5:13, the call to serve one another humbly in love.