

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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JOHN 13 – The heart of the matter

As Jesus and His disciples were approaching the Passover season there was a tremendously emotional atmosphere surrounding the group. Jesus knew exactly what was going to happen to Him, but in His humanity He still felt the depth of apprehension; He was deeply “troubled in His spirit”. The disciples for their part were filled with fear and uncertainty, and some of them had not even wanted to be in Jerusalem on that occasion. It is in such a time of deep emotional conflict that all the outward façade which people use to protect themselves is stripped away, and the true heart of the person is revealed. In this chapter, then, we can see revealed the true heart of Jesus, of Peter, of Judas, of Father God, and of the true disciple throughout time. It is the moment of truth.

1. The heart of Jesus – v 1b. “He now showed them the full extent of His love”. The AV reads “He loved them unto the end”, but we must note this means the end of degree, not the end of time. What He was about to do, the washing of the disciples’ feet, was going to symbolically reveal the fullest degree of His love, e.g., John 15 v 13 “Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”. This action of Jesus in chapter 13 is often seen as an act of great humility and service, but that is to completely miss the point. If that was the “full extent” of His love for us then the cross was meaningless, and we are reduced to a gospel of good works and fine morals. Sadly, that is a very common view today. To understand what Jesus was really doing we need to realise why their feet were washed whenever they went into a house. As they walked everywhere with open sandals, sharing the same tracks as all the animals, it was not just dust they picked up, but filth. The feet-washing was a hygienic necessity. By washing their feet Himself, Jesus was showing them He fully identified with the filth of sin they picked up on the journey of life – a direct symbol of His love in bearing our sin Himself on the cross and paying the penalty. The full extent of His love for us is His substitutionary atonement; “In my place condemned He stood, sealed my pardon with His blood”.
2. The heart of Peter – v 6 to 10. We know Peter was sitting some way away from Jesus, so by the time the Lord reached him he was in a state of some distress that Jesus should be doing such a thing. The feet-washing was usually done by the lowest servant, not the Master. We note that despite Peter being upset, he didn’t offer to do it himself! The answer Peter received from Jesus was that he couldn’t possibly understand what it was all about, because the Atonement hadn’t yet happened; he would understand later, which he certainly did (e.g., 1 Peter 1 v 19). Peter’s disapproval was deeply felt because of his upbringing as a Jew, believing that a legalistic framework was essential in religion; Jesus doing this just wasn’t acceptable. How often even today our Christianity is still qualified by our traditions, our prejudices, our denominational biases, etc., and we miss out on the freedom the Lord would have us enjoy – Galatians 5 v 1a. Thinking of the meaning behind the symbol, Jesus rightly tells Peter that he would have no part with the Lord if he didn’t let Jesus wash away his sin – clearly indicating the nature of the Gospel. Peter seems to take that as a mild rebuke, so with a little bit of pique he says that perhaps then Jesus ought to wash him all over. Sometimes when the Lord reminds us of shortcomings in our lives, we can get a bit offended with Him (not that we would admit it!) and then wonder if we should ask Him into our lives again, or be baptised again, because clearly, we didn’t get it right the first time. Jesus assures Peter that his faith is sound, and not to rush to a false conclusion.

3. The heart of Judas – v 2b and v 21 to 30. Judas entered the room that evening with the devil's temptation already playing on his mind. However, the temptation didn't give way to the action until Satan entered into him in verse 27. We are all tempted, often, but the die was cast when Judas refused the final opportunity to resist. This is a supreme example of the grace of God. Jesus, with His foreknowledge, knew what Judas would do, but as God does with all of us, He gave him yet another opportunity to turn away from temptation. Jesus didn't put the piece of bread into Judas' mouth – Judas had to reach out and take it himself, and it was that action of his will that sealed his fate. This is a classic example of the balance between God's sovereignty and mankind's freewill. As the supreme judge, with perfect justice, God gives everyone a final moment of decision. Otherwise, each human being could not be held accountable, which certainly they are (Romans 3 v 19 and 14 v 12). As God's sovereignty includes His foreknowledge, and as He is above and beyond time, He knew our decision before the creation and made His plans for us accordingly.
4. The heart of Father God – v 31. Although we freely acknowledge the different personalities and their duties within the Trinity, we also recognise the total oneness in love, purpose and essence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Given this essential Oneness between the three persons of the Trinity, we cannot accept that there is any sense in which Father was not as intimately involved with the plan of our redemption as Jesus was. The idea that the atonement was "cosmic child abuse", to quote one modern writer, is complete and utter heresy. Jesus made it quite plain that our Heavenly Father was just as deeply involved with what was about to happen at Calvary as Jesus Himself would be. Here we read that God (Father) is glorified in Jesus, and in 2 Corinthians 5 v 19 we read that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. Father God is not some stern distant divine being who is indifferent to our eternal wellbeing, but "so loved the world that He gave His One and Only son".
5. The heart of the true disciple – v 14 to 15 and v 34 to 35. The rule of law has been replaced by the rule of love. Under the rule of law, any transgressor is to be treated as an outcast, but under the rule of love we are to forgive, restore, and seek to understand what may be going wrong in each other's life (Galatians 6 v 1 – 2). When Jesus tells us to wash one another's feet, He means it in the same sense as when He washed the disciples' feet – not condoning sin but removing it. We cannot do that ourselves, but in our love and understanding we can minister the love of Jesus in helping the one who has fallen to regain their sense of repentance, forgiveness, and wholeness. Sadly, this does not always happen, and we are very good at leaving a fellow Christian, who has fallen into sin in some way, with the sense of shame, guilt and alienation that just shouldn't happen in the Christian community.