

Gospel of John - episode 25

Chapter 13 part 2

Welcome to St. John's Gospel where we continue with chapter 13. I want to look at the text for the first time. "It was before the festival of the Passover, and Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass over from this world to the Father. He had always loved those who were his in the world, but now he showed how perfect his love was. They were at supper and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God".

I want to reflect on that, just for a little while. They were at supper. We have already entered the love feast of the kingdom of God. We always refer to it as the Last Supper because it was Jesus' last meal. This is The Event; this supper was going to be celebrated by Christians for all time as a memorial of their beloved Lord and as a participation in these mysteries. The farewell discourse will come out of this Eucharistic experience that Jesus initiates. He puts it all in the context of a meal where there is fraternal love and unity present; so much so that later writers like St. Paul, in 1Corinthians 10-11 said, "because there is one loaf, we are one body, because we partake of this one loaf". The early Christians knew that the Eucharistic celebration is one of fraternal love and unity, as well as being a memorial of Jesus.

We are now into chapters 13-16, which is paradise for us, and we must ask the question, would Satan insinuate himself into paradise? You know the answer, because go back to the book of Genesis and find that when man was in a love relationship with God, in God's divine holy Will, Satan insinuated himself into that situation to bring disaster on humanity. Satan is present here also. He's at work even among Jesus' family. This is the shock that we must wake up to and never, ever be scandalised that there are Judas's - people who betray Jesus, in the church. We must never be scandalised. Remember that the Gospel of Matthew revealed there was going to be darnel among the wheat, and that the sorting out wouldn't be done until the harvest time.

So, Judas Iscariot is present and finds himself on the side of below. It's because of something very simple, and we have to look at it because everything is given to us for our learning. It's because Judas refused to give his heart to Jesus; because he refused to surrender his life as a disciple. He held on to his sinfulness and unbelief to the end. All of us have to face that decision in our lives as to whether we will surrender to God and our Redeemer or whether we stay in our sin.

Because Judas held on to his sin and his unbelief, he became the agent of evil. Now, Jesus told us this himself in John 8:44 that "anyone who sins is a slave" to evil. He told us in John 12:31 also, that the prince of this world is around - and there are other places like Luke 22:3 and 1Corinthians 2:8. So, we have to realise that the devil is an unseen and often unrecognised power behind the refusal to believe. Refusal to believe is called 'unbelief'. Refusal to repent is called 'sin', so, behind the unbelief and the sin of the cosmos, of the unbelieving world is the prince of this world. Jesus said so himself. Because Judas stayed in the cosmos, he stayed in the unbelieving world, he is going to do the unthinkable; he will hand

Jesus over to torture and death. He has already organised it, as I've said, so he must be feeling very uncomfortable in this loving atmosphere of the Last Supper.

I now want to emphasise something that people don't talk about at all. "Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands". I want to look at this. What was it that Jesus knew? 1): Jesus knew that the future of humanity depended on his perfect love. 2): He knew that everything depended on his perfect obedience to the Father; he will tell us that in chapter 14:31. "I want the world (that is the unbelieving world) to know that I love the Father, and therefore I do exactly what my Father tells me". Everything depends on his perfect obedience. The true Passover, that is, the one that brings salvation to the world, can't happen without this perfect love and this perfect obedience.

3): Jesus knew that if he didn't go through with this sacrifice, the world would remain under the power of the devil. Satan would remain the prince of this world, and all God's children would be enslaved for all time. And of course, there would be hell at the other end! So, everything depended on him. Jesus knew this. It's very important for me to say this so you understand Jesus' motivation as he goes forward. 4): Jesus was Wisdom Incarnate; He could have dealt with his deviant disciple, Judas. But for our sake and for our salvation, he accepted Judas' betrayal. Why? Because he wanted to deal with the real enemy that Judas didn't recognise. That real enemy is Satan, so, in order to deal with the real enemy, he put up with this small enemy who was considered a friend.

The world would stay in the vice grip of Satan if Jesus didn't release it. So, everything was in his hands.

5): Jesus knew also, of course, that His Passover was not a death, an ending, a finishing off. It wasn't that. It was not a case of just being entombed; this Passover was going to let the power of God, His mercy, His love and His salvation flow from him. It flowed from him already, not only in his Ministry, but in the Passover.

6): It was going to be the fulfilment of Ezekiel 47, the river of life flowing from the right hand side of the temple. Jesus knew that the power of God would flow through this sacrifice out into the whole world. This river of life would flow throughout history to the whole world to the end of time, and guide the human race towards its destiny in the Lord.

7): Jesus was sure of victory. We were told back in chapter 1:5 that Jesus was the light that the darkness couldn't overpower. He also told us in John 10:30, as I've already told you, that "the Father and I are one". So, the blessed Trinity is involved; Satan is fighting God Himself. The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are all concurring together to save their children. It is this knowledge going forth that supports Jesus in the terrifying trial that they're going to put him through as soon as the unseen forces, that are operating in Judas and in the Sanhedrin are set in motion. Once this happens, everything follows from that.

That's why when Judas gets up to go, Jesus tells him to do it quickly, 'get on with it'. John then says that "they were at supper. The devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray him. Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands and that he had come from God and was returning to God". So, what did he do? He did the most extraordinary thing. "He got up from the table, he removed his outer garment and taking a towel, wrapped it around his waist, and then poured

water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet". That seems awfully trivial from what I've told you. "He began to wipe them with the towel he was wearing". So, there's something about this washing of the feet that isn't obvious on first reading. Jesus was sitting at the head of the table in the position of master and Lord, and he gets down from that position, dresses down to the position of a slave, and he does a slave's job for his disciples. John doesn't want you to miss this. John wants you to get the point. So, this action was prophetic because it explained the meaning of his death. It was on the cross that Jesus was going to do the slave's job of washing us all from our sins - that he was going to be absolutely stripped down, not only physically, but stripped of everything, including his reputation.

Everything would be taken from him and he was going to wash us in his precious blood. He also wants the disciples to hear that if we are going to be like him, that we must give this kind of service to other people, You don't look at whether the other person is poor, rich, healthy or unhealthy, for they are your brothers; you wash their feet! In Paul's letter to Timothy, for example, he says that in discerning if someone is right for a particular office in the church, that person must be willing "to wash the feet of the disciples". They did get the message. It's just that John is the only one of the four Gospels who emphasised it. This was going to become a very important sign for the beloved disciples.

Now a clue as to the meaning of the sign. You won't get on a first reading. You've got to study it. Because John uses the same verb for the laying down of Jesus' clothes here in chapter 13, and the laying down of his life back in chapter 10:11,15,17 and 18. He also uses the same verb for taking his clothes and putting them back on, as he did back in chapter 10, for taking up his life again in verses 17-18. John says that when you go back to chapter 10 and Jesus is talking about laying down his life and taking it up again for his disciples, and here laying down his clothes and picking them up again, that this action is explaining what he said back there.

We must understand that the foot washing done in the Passover celebration was meant to be the duty of a slave, or if there was no slave present, it should have been done by a servant. If there was no servant present, it was meant to be done by the youngest. Well, John was the youngest! It never crossed his head or the heads of any of the apostles to wash one another's feet! So, you'll see that this was the duty of a slave in 1 Samuel 25:41. Why am I bringing this up? It's because I need to remind you that in Luke 22: 24-27 that the apostles were discussing who was the greatest! Who is number one? Since they were thinking in terms of a political Messiah and restoring Israel to a kingship, then the number one means the prime minister. They think in terms of political office at this most sacred moment! They are on the level of below and so far from Jesus thinking. It is utterly amazing. This is why John picks up the event of the washing of the feet and emphasised it to show us how important it is for us to be able to think the way Jesus thinks and to look at things the way he looks at them. Otherwise, we can't truly be his disciples.

So, since they were all wondering who was the greatest, there was no one available to do the menial job of washing the feet. And of course, this job should have been done at the beginning of Passover meal, because during this meal they reclined at table and they normally leaned on the left arm and used the right arm for their eating. This is terribly important when you want to understand where Judas and John and Peter were situated at the Last Supper - the three disciples that have already been pointed out. So,

the apostles have to learn a very simple lesson. I can give it to you very easily in words, but to do this in action is a different matter altogether. If you are a king, you're not a king just because you're sitting at the head of the table. If you're sitting at the bottom of the table, you're still a king. If you're a servant and you're sitting at the top of the table, you're still a servant. And if you're a servant sitting at the bottom of the table, you're still a servant. Who you are in yourself is not determined by your place at table.

Who you are in yourself is not determined by what job you do or what position you hold in society. So, this awesome humility of Jesus, where he would kneel at their feet and do this very simple menial task for them because the washing of the feet was actually needed. They wore open sandals on streets that were not clean, dry or cared for the way they are nowadays. Jesus' attitude shows the disciples that his kingdom is not of this world, as he will tell Pilate in chapter 18. What you find even at this crucial last minute is that the apostles don't have the same mentality as Jesus. Therefore, their reaction to the Passion will be wrong. They are going to have to be humiliated; they will have to fall, rise and repent. They need this experience before they can truly become all that he has asked them to become.

They still want the kingdom of Israel restored - that means the political kingdom of Israel, because Jesus is of the house of David. They still ask Jesus that question literally moments before he ascends into heaven, in his last appearance to them. You see that in acts 1:6 Since, like the rest of the nation, they are fixated on a political messiah and political salvation Jesus is completely isolated. None of them understand him. Only his mother would have understood. So, considering that he knows his betrayer is there and he knows all that I've said to you and an awful lot more besides, his isolation and loneliness must have been unbelievable, and that's before he gets into the Passion at all. So, he wants to say to his church, in going forward, if you want to be like me, you have to be loving and you have to be willing to do menial service to others. It's not menial when it's transformed by love. It's certainly not menial when it's transformed by humility. When it is glorified by love and humility, it is something great in the eyes of God. So, we leave it there for today. Thank you for listening.

interval

Welcome to John's Gospel, the book of Glory chapter 13. We try to enter into the mystery of what is about to be revealed to the apostles. It will be shocks all along the way. Jesus reveals to them what the future holds for them; sometimes they can't hear because of the shock they have just received. So, before we go into the foot washing, let me put before you the two kingdoms that are clashing in the upper room between Jesus and the apostles. Everything seems cosy and comfortable, but it is not so. When you look deeper there are two kingdoms clashing even within the apostles themselves! And I'm not talking about Judas Iscariot among the others! You have the lower worldly level, where the egocentric thing is dominant. If the ego is dominant, then we want power politics and positions in the world; we want importance in the world. That's why I mentioned the last time that the apostles had been talking about who was the greatest. You would pity Jesus trying to get through to them when he is on a completely different level altogether. The opposite of egocentrism on the part of the apostles is this total self-sacrifice on the part of Jesus. So, I'm not talking about Satan and God, I'm just simply talking about what Jesus is

actually meeting inside of his own apostles. When he is dealing with you and me also, he's dealing with exactly the same thing. Until we let go this egocentric thing and let that ego die, love cannot be born in us. Therefore, we too, rise from the death of that ego to the new life; Jesus has the same battle with us also.

Running right through the John's text from chapters 13 to 20, stopping the beginning of chapter 20, you have certain powers clashing. I need to name them so that you won't stay with the high priests (who are baddies), or with Pilate (who is a baddie), or the people who are making the wrong decisions. You won't stay there. You'll go much further and see what is happening in the spirit world, for example, there's going to be a titanic struggle going from the moment Jesus leaves this room to go outside; a titanic struggle between hate opposing love. Hate represents the kingdom of darkness, but it also represents the unbelieving world. Love represents the kingdom of God that Jesus wants to bring into the world to save us. It's going to be power politics versus humble service, as we're going to see with Jesus washing the feet, It's going to be slavery opposing freedom - the slavery to sin. I'm talking about us enslaving ourselves to Satan by going down the route of sin. They are great opposing powers. You have death opposing life; revenge opposing forgiveness. There are huge waves of revenge coming towards Jesus through the high priests for all kinds of reasons, Coming back to them is this wave of forgiveness from Jesus.

So, two worlds clash. You have condemnation - which the world gives very easily. Sometimes people are condemned simply for having a religion. They are condemned for believing, for just being who they are, a certain colour, culture or religion or whatever it is. That condemnation is opposed by Jesus with salvation. Think of these clashes like the waves of an ocean coming at each other; something has to give way. As I said in the last session, Jesus knew he would win, but he has to take them on and deal with them.

Let's come to the foot washing and read a few verses: "Jesus got up from the table, removed his outer garment. He wrapped a towel around his waist. He then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them". We're now talking about the twelve apostles. They look down and see the Lord of Glory at their feet. It's not a slave. It's not a servant. It's not the youngest. **It's the Lord.**

It is something so shocking that they react with silence and stillness. They're not able for it at all. What John wants us to hear is that this very simple sign that Jesus gives them here points to the loving washing that Jesus is going to do for us all on the cross. Because love serves - as they see with Jesus kneeling at their feet. When they look at the cross, they are going to see that Love serves divinely. They are looking not only at love but the absolute limits of love. There's something else as well. Jesus is kneeling at their feet. According to Luke's gospel, the apostles have been discussing high places in a kingdom they think Jesus is going to set up, and Jesus wants to introduce them to the power of powerlessness.

This is a big topic in the Bible., but not something I can go into here, but I want to remind you that the book of Daniel chapter 3 shows that the three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace were completely powerless, according to king Nebuchadnezzar who threw them in. Just to convince you that the fire they were thrown into fully clothed should have killed them, the fire was made seven times hotter than usual! These men could not survive, and yet, not only did they survive, but they sang the praises of

God in the heart of the fire. Here you see the power of powerlessness but what is it? It means that politically and physically you have no power; according to the world, you have no power, but if you're in contact with God, that's different. The power of powerlessness means that you are in contact the only One in the entire universe **who is** the Power From On High. Once you pray things happen. Daniel 3 says that the Lord sent an angel to blow the fire away. The men were powerless; they could do nothing, but because they were able to pray they were able to genuinely touch God and power went out from Him, in a sign given that made the king go on his knees and acknowledge that God of Israel was the true God.

So, here the apostles are powerless to stop Jesus from being killed. Peter is going to make a clumsy attempt to defend Jesus, but we'll deal with that later. It will seem as if Jesus is powerless before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. It will seem but things are not what they seem. He is not only in contact with the Power from on High, He is the power from on high, so, everything will be transformed to the extent that a whole New Era will open up: an era of Mercy and Grace for very undeserving human beings, So, discovering the power of powerlessness is an incredibly important thing at this moment. We must let go of the ego self that we depend on, also our education, our memory and anything else we depend on to replace God.

We've got to let all of that go and start depending on the power from on high and watch your life being transformed. If they stay caught up in the world game, in what appears to be power and position and all the rest of it, they are failed disciples. That's Judas's position. If they allow Jesus in his apparent powerlessness to lift them onto the level of above, they will change the world. It's a really extraordinary thing, so, the stakes are very high. They are very high for Jesus, and for the eleven faithful disciples; they are also very high for the world because we're going to see, when it comes to chapter 17 in the priestly prayer of Jesus, that Jesus says, "Father, I pray for them, not the world", because if these are okay, the world will be okay. I won't worry about the world if these men get it.

So, it's extremely important for the world that these eleven men come through. They react in a speechless way. They can't believe it. Jesus had gone to great trouble in his Ministry to reveal to them seven times that he was **THE GREAT I AM**. They knew that that was the name of the only one true God. If that is true, what is he doing here at their feet? They are so shocked, so amazed that it takes Peter to react. It's really lovely that Peter always takes the leadership and speaks up for the others. What Peter says is what's in the mind of them all. His reaction is their reaction, but they allow Peter to take the leadership. This is how the gospel shows us that Peter wasn't just a leader at the very end of the Ministry. He was a leader all the time and Jesus accepted that.

Peter suddenly realises, 'I should be there. I'm the disciple, he's the Lord'. This is wrong. This shouldn't happen. So, I want to ask a question, because my intention is to try and get you to go deeper than you normally would go. What should they have said seeing Jesus kneeling at their feet? Didn't they see all the glory of God wrapped up in this loving humility and service? They should have! That maybe is the thing that shocked them. Did they see God's greatness manifested in what appears to be a menial service, but one that's absolutely transformed by love and humility? Did they see that? In fact, they must see, unlike the unbelieving world outside - Jesus is going to repeat it over and over again until they get it, that the

kingdom of God operates on love. It's all about love. He leaves only one word with us, **Love**, and he gives it to us as a command also. That love is the power in the kingdom of God. So, the choice before the apostles is the love of power, as in the world's way of doing things, or the power to love, which is Jesus' way, two entirely different ways of living. Humble service is the position that they must take before the whole world. Let me illustrate that just in a very tiny reflection. It is very clear from the four gospels that the Jews hated the Romans. They hated everything about them because the Romans dominated them. So, if Peter knew at this particular moment that he was going to have to spend years in the city of Rome serving these people whom he hated as much as anybody else, he wouldn't have been able to take it. That's precisely what Jesus was going to send him to do! You'll hear that in chapter 21 that Peter will have to go to the very people whom he has hated and rejected in the past, and he will have to kneel at their feet and be their servant.

That's the kingdom of God, and that's the transformation of the world. It's a wonderful conquering of the individual when they can overcome all their natural reactions and let the power, grace and the glory of God come through. In the ancient world, people treated the feet as the lowest part of the body because it was in contact with the earth. Therefore, only the lowest in society would actually wash the feet. In fact, the city of Rome had approximately one third lazy citizens and two thirds slaves and servants looking after them, literally washing their feet.

This is why Peter said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" I'm only your servant. I'm only your disciple. Jesus in his great love said, "at this moment, you don't grasp what I'm doing. You don't understand it, but later you will". Now, 'later' wasn't very far away; it was only a couple of days before the Passion. Peter and the others could only see Jesus washing their physical bodies. They couldn't see the significance of what he was doing. But after the Resurrection, Peter was going to realise very painfully that it was on Calvary that the real washing took place, and that they really needed it. Here is 1 John 1:7 where we read that it is the blood of Jesus that purifies us from all sin. There are a number of references throughout the New Testament, but here is another: Hebrews 9:22 says that without the shedding of blood, there's no forgiveness. So, it's only after the horrendous - according to them - disaster of Good Friday that they will begin in some way to realise that this foot washing merely symbolised what he was going to do on that Friday.

At this point, Peter said, "never. You won't ever wash my feet". Peter is loving but always impulsive. His impulsive reaction gets him into trouble all the time. He reacts but doesn't realise what Jesus is doing, so, Jesus explains to him that he would be cutting himself off. Watch this! Jesus said in 13:8 "if I do not wash you, you can have nothing in common with me". You will have no part in my kingdom. You'll be outside. That means that if we don't enter through the waters of baptism, we're not entering the church at all. That's how the blood of Jesus is given to us initially is through the waters of baptism. That's the first washing. Then we have another washing, of course, and that is the washing of the sacrament of reconciliation. When we come back to him having sinned, he washes us clean again. That's why Jesus said, "you don't understand now". Peter overreacts and said, "okay, my head and my whole body" - in other words, he says, you can give me a bath if that's the case.

For Peter, it was completely intolerable to not be part of what Jesus was doing, not to be close to him, not to hear him, not to experience his love. This is the saving grace for Peter. He loved Jesus, and it's the fact that he loved Jesus meant that he would come through in the end.

Thank you for joining us. Goodbye. God bless.