

A Heart to Serve - *John 13:1-20*

Introduction

- Today we're beginning a new series leading up to Easter
- We're going to be focusing on Jesus: Who he was - The Heart of Christ
- In the Bible there are four books that tell the story of Jesus' life/death/resurrection - The 4 Gospels
- John is the Gospel written from the perspective of "The one Jesus loved". Someone who had a specially close relationship with Jesus, so this is the Gospel that we go to to really see the heart of who Christ was. So this is the Gospel that we're going to be focusing on to understand Jesus' heart.
- We're going to get to know who Jesus is, and what he is like.
- Specifically we're going to be looking at the second half of the book, starting at Ch. 13 and going right through to the end.
- The beginning of Ch. 13 is the beginning of what is called Jesus' farewell discourse. These are events that are taking place immediately before Jesus is arrested and crucified, on the very same night, and we are reading about some of the last lessons that Jesus taught, and instructions that he gave to his disciples before he was crucified.
- As we look into these chapters, and then at the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, our hope is to really be able to dive into seeing who Jesus was, and understand more of the heart of Christ.

Setting the Stage (V. 1-3)

- As we begin today, verses 1-3 really serve to give us an introduction, and set the stage for everything that is about to happen, and they're actually incredibly powerful verses.

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper." - John 13:1-4a (ESV)

- So much could be said about just these few verses, but we begin with these interesting words
"When Jesus knew that his hour had come"

- This is incredibly significant because through much of his ministry, Jesus would tell people about how his *“time had not yet come”*.

“And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” - John 2:4 (ESV)

“You go up to the feast. I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come.” - John 7:8 (ESV)

- Jesus had come into the world in order to fulfil a mission, and he knew that it was time for that to happen
- Nothing was outside of his control. The passage says that he knew it was time for him to *“depart out of this world to the Father”*, showing that Jesus knew what the events of the next few days would bring, and that it was time for him to die.
- The next part of this verse is so important as we read about Jesus *“having loved his own”*, and *“loving them to the end”*
- We can't miss the intensity of what's going on here, and the depth of love that is being described, knowing that Jesus is soon going to be giving up his life, and put to death on the cross.
- The “Them” that's being referred to here is really referring to Jesus' disciples, and those who would follow him.
- A picture of this love for his disciples will be shown in Jesus' actions later in this chapter, and will ultimately culminate in Jesus *“loving them to the end”*, referring to the end of his life which is not far off.
- Beginning with V. 2 we now see more of the intensity of the situation that is being presented to us here:

“the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him” - John 13:2 (ESV)

- And we can see that there's this whole drama going on in the background of this story, an intense conflict is taking place. Jesus knows that his time has come, God's plan to bring salvation to the world through Christ is about to reach its climax, yet at the same time we have Satan working in the background, trying to subvert God's plan, and get rid of Jesus.
- But looking at the next verse we can see and be comforted that there was never any hope for Satan's victory in this situation in V. 3 as we are told that

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper.” - John 13:3-4a (ESV)

- Jesus knows that his death is coming. He understands what he is about to go through, and knows already about Satan's schemes and that Judas will betray him. While Satan is hoping to destroy God's plan by having Jesus put to death, what he doesn't understand is that that is the very reason that Jesus came to earth in the first place. His attempts to defeat God are actually just a part of bringing about God's ultimate plan. God is still in complete control, and the devil never had a hope of victory in this.
- There is such intensity in these verses, as we know the level of suffering that Jesus is about to endure, yet he seems calm. He trusted in his Father in heaven, knowing that God was in control, and that this was the reason for him coming to earth to begin with. As V. 1 said, "*his hour had come*".
- And it's important to note that the Father has given all things into Jesus' hands at this point. Jesus has all authority and power in the world, and that is such a significant thing to remember as we come into V. 4 as Jesus gets up from the meal in order to perform an action which will be such a significant expression of the love that he has for his disciples.

Jesus shows his love through his act of service (V. 4-11)

- What we're about to see in the first half of this passage is that Jesus shows his love through an act of service.
- In verses 4-5 we read what Jesus did when he rose from the meal:

"He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him." - John 13:4-5 (ESV)

- We think of this idea of foot washing as being a bit odd, and not something that we would ever do, but this would have been beyond a shocking moment for the disciples.
- Foot washing was the task given to the lowest of the servants. Jesus was the master and the teacher of his disciples, he was the last person who ever should have been washing his disciples' feet.
- But these two verses become even more significant and powerful if you remember the first three. Jesus is not just a great teacher, he is the Son of God, whom God has given all authority and power on earth. There is no one greater on earth.
- In preparing for this sermon I read in D.A. Carson's commentary on the book of John, and he really hi-lights the power and the significance of this moment:

- *“With such power and status at his disposal, we might have expected him to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation, and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath. Instead, he washes his disciples’ feet, including the feet of the betrayer.”*
- Jesus knows about Satan’s schemes, he knows that he is in the final day before his death, yet he does not use this time to try to avoid what’s coming, despite all his power, rather he humbles himself to the lowest place, of the lowest servant in order to wash the feet of his disciples.
- It was also something that gave a picture to the disciples of what Jesus was about to do and the sacrifice he was going to make. This act of service and humility that Jesus showed in washing his disciples feet was a picture of the ultimate act of humility and love that Jesus would show when he, the Son of God, laid down his life on the cross, making himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world.
- This is something that cannot be over stated. Jesus, as the teacher, should have been the last one to wash anyone’s feet. It was embarrassing work, that was reserved for the lowest person, yet he humbled himself to wash the feet of his followers, showing his love for them. In the same way, Jesus, as the Son of God, should have been the last person to have to die, especially considering that he had never once sinned. He did nothing to deserve that death, yet he humbled himself to the place of a criminal, crucified beside criminals, taking on an excruciating death and paying the penalty for our sins.
- It’s such an amazing thing that Jesus is doing for the disciples, and the image that he’s giving them is so powerful, yet they struggle to understand it.
- Most of the disciples are just sitting in stunned silence as these events unfold, completely shocked by the way that Jesus has flipped social conventions on their head, but Peter, who has never had any trouble making his thoughts known, won’t sit by and allow Jesus to be humiliated this way.
- Verses 6-7 say:

“He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” - John 13:6-7 (ESV)

- So we can see the respect that Peter has for Jesus, that it’s so wrong in his mind to see Jesus taking the role of a servant this way, causing him to object. What he’s missing though, is that there is a much deeper meaning and lesson to what Jesus is doing. He’s not just washing feet for the sake of washing them.

- And Jesus points that out, that Peter does not understand, but soon will, that this act of Christ humbling himself is a picture of the much greater way in which Jesus will take on the role of a servant in his death.
- Peter however continues to object in V. 8, saying

“Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” - John 13:8 (ESV)

- This is such a significant moment, because Jesus is making clear to Peter that this act of humility and service from Jesus is needed, even though it seems so wrong by Peter’s understanding. And again, Jesus is not just talking here about washing feet. He is making clear that for him to take on that role of a servant, and humble himself to the point of death, is such a needed sacrifice, even though he does not deserve it. In Jesus giving up his life on the cross, he pays the penalty that we deserve for our sins, and allows us to have salvation through him. Without that sacrifice, we have no hope.
- Then in V. 9-11 we see the conclusion of this conversation with Peter:

“Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean.” - John 13:9-11 (ESV)

- So Peter does a complete 180, saying now “Don’t just wash my feet, wash the rest of me too”, still missing the fact that it’s not about the actual washing that Jesus is doing, but what that is pointing to, that through his sacrifice on the Cross he will provide a way for people to be washed or cleansed from their sins.
- He again nails that home when he says that Peter is clean, but not all of the disciples were clean. He was clearly talking about Judas who had already decided to betray Jesus, yet Judas was still among the other disciples, and Jesus washed his feet as well. You see, Jesus is making clear that there is not magic power in what he’s doing in washing the disciples feet, that in order to be a real follower of Jesus someone has to come and scrub your feet for you, but rather what he’s doing is giving an example of his incredible love which will be fully shown on the cross.

Jesus teaches his followers to show the same love (V. 12-20)

- Now we see as we come to V. 12 that as Jesus finishes washing his disciples feet, he’s not quite done teaching them about the significance of what he’s done. V. 12 says:

“When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” - John 13:12 (ESV)

- We know that they don't because Jesus said so in V. 6, but now that Jesus has shown his love for his disciples through his act of service to them, he's going to teach them a lesson, explaining more about what he's just done, what it means, and how they should respond.
- In this last half of the passage, Jesus teaches his followers to show the same sacrificial love to one another.
- In V. 13-17, Jesus continues to elaborate saying,

“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.” - John 13:13-17 (ESV)

- So Jesus makes it clear that he knows that, culturally speaking, he should have been exempt from doing something like washing the feet of his disciples, but what he's done is give them an example, and he tells his disciples that they should follow that example, and be willing to show the same kind of humility and love to each other that they have been shown by Christ.
- And in verse 16 he is telling them that if he, who is the master, is willing to wash their feet, or show such humble love to them, then they should not think that they themselves are above showing that kind of sacrificial love to one another. They are not so great that they are above the kind of humility that Jesus has displayed.
- And humility is something that the disciples had always struggled with, in some instances they had even argued about who was the greatest out of all of them. We have an example of this in Mark 9, where we read:

“And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.” - Mark 9:33-34 (ESV)

- So Jesus is making clear that his act of service and humility is not only to point to his sacrifice on the cross, but also to give the disciples a picture of what it really means to follow him. It's not about fighting each other about who is better than everyone else, it's about being willing to follow the example of humble and sacrificial love set for us by Christ.
- Now when Jesus is talking about the example that he has set, he is not saying that his disciples should just wash one another's feet, and not that we as Christians have been commanded to

wash one another's feet, making that a regular part of our services together. What he is referring to, rather, is the example of the love that he has shown, not caring that society would have seen him as far superior than his disciples, or that he really was much greater than anyone on earth as the Son of God, but rather humbling himself and being willing to serve them in the most menial way.

- In Philippians Ch. 2 Paul refers to Jesus' incredible humility in order to encourage the Church to show a similar kind of humility to one another, saying:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” - Phil. 2:3-7 (ESV)

- This is the love that Christ showed, and the example that he set, and this is the love that he urges us to show to one another. And this kind of love is as counter cultural an idea for us now as it was for the disciples back then.
- We all struggle in similar ways to the disciples, thinking we deserve to be treated a certain way, or having some desire to be better than those around us.
- But that is not what Jesus does, and it is not what he instructs us to do as his followers.
- What Christ is trying to teach his disciples, and by extension us is that we are to follow the example the Christ is setting for us here, and be willing to humble ourselves in order to care for those around us.
- And this is a love that can be shown in the simplest ways. It doesn't always need to be shown in these grand expressions, it's a love that we can show in our every day lives. What are simple ways that you could show this love to your spouse? Your family? People you encounter in the store? Maybe it's being willing to take out the trash, or do some chore around the house, even though you did it last week, and it should be someone else's turn. Maybe that looks like letting someone go ahead of you in the grocery store even though you were next in line because you can see they are in a hurry. Maybe it even means wearing a mask right now when you go out and about to help others feel comfortable, even if you don't think it's necessary.
- And not doing these things out of frustration, thinking “fine, I guess if I have to...”, but showing that kind of simple and humble love that Christ showed to his disciples in this passage.
- This passage then concludes with Jesus' words, summing up what he has already said:

“I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” - John 13:18-20 (ESV)

- Here Jesus points out again that he knows of Judas’ impending betrayal, and is prepared for it, and it is all happening in order to fulfil what the Scriptures have said about him.
- He also uses this to give the disciples hope, that he knows what is coming, and when they see these things happen, as Jesus is betrayed and crucified, they should see the truth that he truly is the Son of God, and is himself God, who came to love them through his act of Sacrifice, and V. 20 concludes this passage with Jesus giving a bit of foreshadowing of what is to come for the disciples after he is raised from the dead, and sends the Holy Spirit as a helper for them.

Conclusion

- So ultimately in this passage we have such a clear picture into the heart of Christ. In the first half of the passage he showed his love through his act of service, and in the second half he taught us to show that same love.
- So as we’ve begun to explore the heart of Christ, we see that the heart of Christ is a heart to serve out of love, and a heart that calls us to follow that example.
- So where do we go from here?
- I want to end with giving a challenge to each of us today, including myself. Show this kind of love. Follow the example that Jesus gave to his disciples, as well as to us in this passage.
- Everyone knows about the “Golden Rule”, that is, treat others the way you want to be treated. What Jesus has taught is that we are called to treat others even better than we would want ourselves to be treated. Be willing to love one another more than we love ourselves without expecting anything in return. And that love will often require sacrifice, whether that is the sacrifice of time, being willing to spend time with someone who is struggling, or take on a job that no one else wants, or maybe it could be the sacrifice of resources, or finances in giving to the church or someone else in need rather than using it for yourself. There are so many examples of how we can show this love, and not showing in in order to gain recognition for ourselves, but showing this love so that others will be able to see a picture of the love that Christ has shown to us.

- And this isn't love that we are able to show perfectly on our own. We need Jesus' help in this. We need to understand that this is not the way we will normally want to live, and we need to be asking him to help us follow the example that he has set for us.
- As we continue through this series we will continue to see more of the heart of Christ, but we will also be challenged by what we find. As we see how Christ lived, we are also challenged to follow his example, so I want to leave you with that challenge today. Jesus was willing to love each of us through an amazing act of humility, so let us, as a church, strive to follow the example he set for us, loving one another with that kind of sacrificial love, being willing to love one another more than ourselves as an example of the great love that we have received in Christ.