

AT JUDAS' FEET

by David H. Roper

As we look at this passage in John 13, it is important that we understand the situation the Lord faced as he did these things and uttered these words to his disciples in the Upper Room. This was his darkest hour. Less than twenty-four hours later, he went to the cross.

Inside, the disciples are meeting with the Lord, and outside there is confusion and hostility. The Passover plot is under way. The men who have been plotting Jesus' death for some time are now ready to act. Things are no better within the Upper Room. We know from reading the other Gospel accounts that the disciples were arguing and fighting among themselves, trying to determine who was the greatest among them and who would have honor in the kingdom, when the Lord came into his own. Of course, Judas himself was also in the Upper Room. This gives you some idea of the climate in which the following things took place.

It is interesting to see the Lord's actions through all of these events, and to note his poise, the quietness of his heart. Jesus has a resource, and it is very obvious that he does. There are times when he is troubled. John says of him -- and once he said of himself -- that he was troubled in his heart. This is the same term that Jesus uses later when he says to the disciples, "Don't let your hearts be troubled," {cf, John 14:1}. It is descriptive of an emotional state of agitation. As Jesus had to face honestly the climate that was against him, the disorder among his own disciples, and the hostility outside which would culminate in his death, he experienced times when he was in turmoil.

This was a very difficult time for the Lord, and he reacted as you would react. We have to remember that Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine. He experienced all the emotions that we feel, and there were times when he was in emotional turmoil. But he kept reaching back to the Father, relying on him, and that is where he found the strength to act with poise and grace toward his disciples. With all this in the back of our minds, let's read Chapter 13, Verses 1 through 20:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher, and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If, I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these

things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." {John 13:1-20 NASB}

This passage neatly divides around two ideas:

- First, what Jesus knew, and
- Second, what he did as a result of that knowledge.

The first three verses tell us what he knew; the remaining verses tell us what actions grew out of that knowledge.

John tells us that, first of all, Jesus knew that his death was imminent, his hour had come. "His hour" was the hour of his death. Secondly, he knew that the traitor was in their midst. The other Gospels record that Jesus said "the hand of the betrayer is on the table with us" (Luke 22:21). Judas was there in their midst. Thirdly, we are told that he knew where he was going, he knew where he had come from, and he had authority to sustain him along the way. His origin was in God. He had come from God, he was going back to God, and it was God's power that sustained him en route. Those were the things that made it possible for him to act the way he acted. He knew clearly who he was, because he saw himself in relationship to his Father, and he knew he was okay. He knew that he had what he needed to face these circumstances.

Now, you would think that Jesus' disciples would be concerned about him and minister to him during this time. But they ignore him. They are so interested in their own problems and preoccupied with their own thinking that they completely miss the fact that he is hurting and in trouble. But because the Lord knows who he is -- in terms of his relationship to God -- he is able to minister to the disciples, instead of them ministering to him.

Now, what is true of our Lord is true of us in our identification with him. Paul says, "We are made complete in him," {cf, Col 1:28, 2:10}. We have exactly the same relationship with the Father that he had. We are sons of God, and heirs with Christ. Thus we have a divine origin as well. John talks about our life that comes from God. When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you receive God's life, divine life. And so your origin is Jesus' origin, and your destiny is to be with God. Nothing can change that -- not the decision you have to make tomorrow, not your actions today -- nothing can change your destiny if you belong to God. That is a great thing to know. The contract you are going to sign tomorrow is not going to change your destiny. The call that you make in the huddle tomorrow is not going to affect your destiny. You are secure in your relationship to God.

It is God's authority that sustains you en route; therefore, you, like the Lord, can face any circumstance with poise and with calmness of heart. You do not need to be ministered to; you can minister. That is what makes God's family so unique. Even when we are hurting -- and I am sure many of you are troubled about many things -- we can minister to others because we know the Father as our Lord knew the Father. Even if you are hurting, you can care about someone else's hurt.

Now, so that you will understand the cultural setting of this passage, you should know that it was the practice in those days to bathe on the way to some special occasion. There were large, public Roman baths, and normally that was where the people would prepare themselves for some special occasion. Few people had bathtubs in their homes, so they would go to the Roman baths and bring clean clothes to put on after their baths. Then they would go on to the special occasion, such as this gathering in the Upper Room. But, since they wore sandals, as they would make their way through the streets, their feet would be defiled, they would get dirty. So, in preparation for the meal, normally the household servant would wash their feet -- and thus they would be clean all over. That is the cultural setting for this incident in the Upper Room.

There are two things I want you to see in this section:

- First, the parable that the Lord gives us of his own ministry, and,
- Second, the pattern that he provides for our ministry.

I think that John, in describing the Lord's actions, is giving us a parable -- a sort of visual aid to explain Jesus' ministry on earth.

The passage says that Jesus "rose from supper, and laid aside His garments..." You will note that the word "garments" is plural. In those days men wore three layers of clothing. They wore an outer cape, a sort of long robe that would reach to the ankles; under that they wore a knee-length tunic; and then as an undergarment, they wore a sort of breechcloth. You can gather from this passage that when Jesus began to wash their feet he took off both of his outer garments. He took off his outer robe, the long, flowing robe that he wore, and also the short tunic. So he was dressed in his undergarment -- a breechcloth, the sort of apparel that a slave would wear -- as he washed the disciples' feet.

Then Jesus proceeds with the actual foot-washing. We can gather from this passage that he washes the feet of all of the disciples, including Judas. Then he puts his garments back on and sits down. In describing these actions, John is picturing for us the Lord's ministry. Jesus was at the right hand of the Father, he shared all the rights and privileges of the Father. And yet, Paul tells us, he stripped himself of the independent use of his glory. He took off his garments, so to speak, and became a man. As a man, he served, and the extent of his service was death. He was obedient even to the point of death. He poured out his life for us. Then, having done that, Paul says, Jesus was "highly exalted" and was given "the name that is above every name," {Phil 2:9 NASB}. That is, he put on his robes again and sat down at the right hand of the Father.

This is instructive to me and tells me what the Lord came to do. He came to be a servant. He came to do the things that no one else wanted to do. He came to clean up the messes that everyone else made, because, basically, that is what a servant does.

I have lost track of the number of times I have looked in our front bathroom and seen towels strewn all over the place. I find the first boy who has wet hair, and I say, "Hey, you left the bathroom in a mess." Invariably, he says, "I didn't do it; my brother did." I say, "That's all right -- you clean it up anyway."

That is what servanthood is -- cleaning up other peoples' messes. That is what the Lord came to do. He spent his life cleaning up the messes that we make, putting things back together. He was a servant; he poured himself out even to the point of death.

The thing that is instructive to me is that Jesus poured himself out as a servant even for Judas. All the way through Jesus' association with Judas he was reaching out to him. He knew from the very beginning who it was who would betray him. Many times, through allusions, he would try to draw Judas toward him. His comment in the Upper Room that he was aware of what was going on was one of these attempts. Toward the end of his life, as he approaches the cross and sees Judas moving irrevocably toward betraying him, Jesus reaches out for Judas. Then, in this incident in the Upper Room, he washes the feet of Judas, the betrayer.

Evidently, all through their association, Jesus never gave any hint to any of the disciples that he knew it would be Judas who would betray him. The disciples were not aware of who the betrayer was when Jesus said that one of them would betray him. No one knew. The Lord loved Judas. There was never a hint of resentment, never even one note of bitterness. He just loved him and kept reaching out to him.

Even in the final incident, when Jesus dips the morsel into the little pot of meat and hands it to Judas, having prefaced the act by the words "He who has eaten My bread has lifted up his heel against Me," he is saying to Judas, "Do you understand what you are doing? Do you grasp the enormity of this act?"

The passage which Jesus quotes here, "He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me," is from a psalm that David wrote when he went into exile. He had been betrayed by his own son, and that was the expression of his heart: "The one who has eaten bread with me, who sat at my table, has betrayed me!" {Psa 41:9 NASB}. Then, in this symbolic way, Jesus gives Judas a piece of bread to show him again that the one

who had eaten bread at his table was going to betray him. The Lord was reaching out to Judas a final time. It was never too late for Judas, but at this point his mind was made up. So he went out to betray the Lord. You don't see any hint of the Lord rejecting Judas -- not one hint. He loved him and served him as one of his own. I see a parable in these actions of our Lord, and the parable tells us the nature of Christ's ministry.

The second thing that I see is that this is a pattern for our ministry, because the Lord said, "What I did, you are to do." He said this first to the disciples, and, by extension, to all who follow him. We are to trace the same pattern. We are to be the same sort of servants. Now, it is apparent that when Jesus said that we are to do what he did he is not talking about washing feet. There is certainly nothing wrong with washing feet -- probably some of us could stand both to receive and to give this service -- but that is not what Jesus was talking about. In the first place, Jesus said to the disciples, "You don't understand what I am doing, but you will understand later." If he was merely talking about washing feet, they would understand. There is nothing particularly difficult to understand about washing feet. You learn that technique in a matter of minutes. Jesus has something else in mind.

Secondly, Jesus begins to talk first to Peter and then to the rest of the disciples about the nature of the salvation that he came to bring, and he identifies that with the act of washing feet. He comes to Peter and begins to wash his feet, and Peter says, "No, no; you will never wash my feet!" And Jesus says, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me." Jesus certainly did not mean by that statement that he was offended by Peter's dirty feet and wouldn't associate with him as long as his feet were dirty. Anyone who would embrace dirty little urchins on the streets of Jerusalem and love them certainly wouldn't be offended by dirty feet. There is something else wrong.

Peter's dirty feet symbolized a deeper spiritual condition which could affect his relationship with the Lord in some way. So Jesus says to Peter, "Unless I wash your feet, you can't have any part with me." Peter, predictably, responds, "Then, Lord, give me a bath all over! Wash my head, my hands, everything!" Jesus says, "No, you are already clean; you need only to have your feet washed." What Jesus meant by "clean" or "bathed all over" was that the disciples, because of their relationship to Jesus, had been cleansed of their sin, they had been justified. They had been declared righteous because they aligned themselves with God's program to bring salvation to the world. They had identified themselves with Jesus, they had entrusted themselves to him, and they were clean -- except for Judas.

But just as walking through the streets gets your feet dirty, walking through the world causes an accumulation of moral dirt. We get our feet defiled. We begin to pick up the attitudes of the world -- sometimes without being aware of it. And that is what had happened to the disciples. They were beginning to reflect the attitude of the world outside. Outside, there was hostility; people were bent on destroying Jesus. Inside, essentially, there was no difference. These men were still thinking of themselves. They weren't concerned about the Lord's needs; they were preoccupied with their own. Jesus is saying, "You have picked up the attitude of the world -- you have defiled your feet." And so he washes their feet.

The remedy for defiled feet, Jesus says, is washing. Now, you can wash them yourself. That is clear from Verse 10, where Jesus says, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet." He doesn't say "have his feet washed." See the difference? It is possible for you to wash your own feet if they are defiled. Or, if for some reason you won't or can't wash your own feet, someone else can wash them for you. Someone can come to you in a spirit of love and tenderness and concern and point you to the Word and to repentance, and call you back to the Lord.

Jesus said this is a ministry that all of us should engage in -- either washing our own feet when they become defiled, or washing one another's feet. He says in Verse 20, "He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." That is, "I am sending you out as my emissary to wash feet. And when people receive you, when they allow you to wash their feet, it is as though I myself am washing their feet." Now, that gives significance to foot-washing. That puts dignity into servanthood. When you go out to clean up other people's messes, you go to serve their needs and minister to people who are hurting, who are failing, who are engulfed by sin, who are defiled by the actions of others around them. If you go out to minister to them, it is as though the Lord himself were washing their feet and ministering to their needs.

When we gather around the Lord's table, it is just as though we were put back into the same situation that the disciples experienced. The Lord is there washing our feet today. It is only on the basis of our relationship to him that we can ever be cleansed all over, or can wash away the defilement that our feet have picked up this last week. As you minister to your own spiritual needs, and to the needs of the people around you, and reach out to your friends that are in trouble and serve them, it is the Lord himself who is serving through you. That lends dignity and significance to your ministry.

Perhaps your feet are defiled today and you know it. You sense that your relationship with God has grown cold, you don't love the Lord -- you have grown indifferent. It is because something in your life is defiling you. You know you have been cleansed, you know that God has forgiven you of all your sins; and yet you know there is some area of your life where you are resisting the lordship of Christ, and this is affecting your relationship to the Lord. His relationship to you is always secure -- he is always there -- but this sin has affected the way you feel about him.

- Perhaps it is a relationship that you have been hanging onto that you know is wrong, or ought to be changed.
- Perhaps it is some shoddy business practice you have been involved with, or some attitude toward your children, or your parents, your husband, or your wife.

Whatever it is, this is an appropriate time to wash your own feet -- or to let the Lord wash your feet. That is really what is involved with this action. It is the Lord cleansing us from sin. Or perhaps this scripture has shown you that you need to go to someone you love and minister to his or her needs. That is what we are here to do today.

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(1 Thessalonians 5:11-23 {NASB})**

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