

The Upper Room - Study One

Introduction

What would it be like to spend five hours with Jesus the night before He was crucified? In the Farewell Discourses of John 13–17, our Lord spent close to that amount of time in a period that began with His washing the disciples' feet and ended with His High Priestly Prayer. In this series, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson explains these chapters in order to bring us into a greater knowledge of our Saviour. Dr. Ferguson shows us the heart of Jesus and the hearts of His disciples during a time of anxiety but also approaching glory. In the process, we see clearly the need for the centrality of Christ in Christian life and worship.

Footwashing in Five Stages

Message Introduction

The day before His crucifixion, Jesus shared His heart with His disciples. In what we know as the Upper Room or Farewell Discourse of John 13–17, He announced His betrayal and denial; foretold His death, glorification, and departure from this world; promised the coming Holy Spirit; and prayed in preparation for all that was to take place. In this series, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson walks us through these events, whose setting he calls “five wonderful hours with the Master.” In this message, Dr. Ferguson especially examines Jesus' foot-washing in five stages, physically and theologically, in which He reveals Himself as the One who served us in order that we might serve others.

Scripture readings

John 13:1–12, Philippians 2:5–11

Learning objectives

1. To understand the importance of the foot-washing incident in John 13
 2. To recognize the theological significance behind this foot-washing
 3. To realize that the centrality of Christ is foundational to the Christian life
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Quotation

The doctrine, which points out to us the power and benefit of the coming of Christ, is far more clearly exhibited by [John] than by the rest. And as all of them had the same object in view, to point out Christ, the three former [gospels] exhibit his body, if we may be permitted to use the expression, but John exhibits his soul. On this account, I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is a key to open the door for understanding the rest; for whoever shall understand the power of Christ, as it is here strikingly portrayed, will afterwards read with advantage what the others relate about the Redeemer who was manifested.

- John Calvin

Study questions

1. The Farewell Discourse occurs within John's Book of Signs, which sets forth the person and work of Jesus.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 2. We come to the Farewell Discourse from two contexts:
 - a. That of the gospel of John and Philippians 2
 - b. That of the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory
 - c. That of the gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels
 - d. That of the gospel of John and the contemporary hearer
 3. Peter initially protested that Jesus should not wash him and, in so doing, failed to see beyond his dirty feet.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 4. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples before Satan tempted Judas to betray Jesus.
 - a. True
 - b. False
 5. John Calvin's description that the gospel of John reveals the soul of Jesus is held:
 - a. In connection with His possession of a body
 - b. In contrast to His possession of a body
 - c. In connection with His coming as the God-man
 - d. In contrast to the other gospels emphasizing His body
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6. The foot-washing performed by Jesus comes as a dramatic _____ of His identity and work.

- a. Parable
- b. Narrative
- c. Idiom
- d. Hyperbole

7. Jesus washed His disciples' feet in order to:

- a. Comfort them in their grief
- b. Expose their pride and self-investment
- c. Institute a perpetual ordinance for the church
- d. Prepare the disciples for dinner

8. Christ's washing His disciples' feet manifested:

- a. His humility
- b. His exaltation
- c. His redemptive work
- d. All of the above
- e. None of the above

Bible Study

1. Recognizing the importance of parallel accounts for the Last Supper in the other gospels, how does Luke 22:24–30 heighten the significance of the foot-washing?

2. As we read our Bibles, it does not take long to realize how the historical setting contributes significantly to our understanding of a passage. How do we benefit by knowing that washing guests' dirty feet (soiled by travels on dirt paths and roads) was a menial task typically assigned to household servants?

3. What is the connection between John 10:17–18 and Jesus' disrobing, then taking up His clothes again in order to return to His place at the table?

Discussion questions

1. Dr. Ferguson calls attention to John Calvin's description of the gospel of John as setting forth the "soul" of Jesus in a more pronounced way than the Synoptic Gospels, which focus more on the "body" of Jesus. Discuss the meaning of this claim. Why must we be careful to qualify Calvin's argument?

2. Dr. Ferguson notes that in the Farewell Discourse, "one of the things we will discover personally is that our whole framework of reference is moved

to have Jesus Christ at its centre.” Explain what Dr. Ferguson means by this as it relates to Christ and to us.

3. What does Dr. Ferguson mean when he claims that this foot-washing symbolized not just our justification but also our delivery from the Satanic powers that bind us?

Application

1. You cannot truly serve others without the humbled and exalted Saviour serving you. Do you understand what He has done? Have you personally experienced His washing?

2. Those who are washed or served by the kneeling and exalted Christ will be transformed to serve others even in the most menial tasks. Come up with at least one concrete way that you can do this.

3. Christians continue to struggle with thoughts of greatness, which blinds us to the needs of others. Think of one specific example of how this occurs in families and another example of how it occurs in the church.

For further study

D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*

R.C. Sproul, *John*
