

General Comments on John 13

There are two different subjects dealt with in this chapter. First is the washing of the apostle's feet at the Last Supper (v. 1-20), the second is the prediction of Jesus' betrayal by one of the apostles (v. 21-38).

The context of v. 1-20 is explained in Luke 22:24-27. The events of Luke 22:24-27 occurred just minutes before the events of this chapter:

24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. 25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26 But ye [shall] not [be] so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. 27 For whether [is] greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? [is] not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. 29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; 30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The apostles argue among themselves which is the most senior. Jesus then teaches them by example how they really should treat one another.

Verses 21-38 then deal with the imminent betrayal by Judas Iscariot, which sets the stage for the end of Jesus' mortal ministry. Jesus recognizes the necessity of the betrayal and welcomes the consequences. He tries to explain the necessity of his leaving them, in that he is giving them the perfect example of love (v. 31-35), but they do not grasp what he is saying (v. 36-38).

In reading v. 21-38, if the reader were observing these events in real time, and was not privy to the private exchange between John and Jesus, then it would look like Jesus is identifying Peter as the betrayer. The casual observer never would have equated Judas Iscariot with the betrayer, even as the disciples didn't (v. 28-29). Even Peter and John have to resort to a confidential enquiry in order to discover who the culprit

is, so it is plain none of the disciples suspect Judas Iscariot in the least. And, there is no indication Peter was made privy to what Jesus told John concerning Judas, so only John knew.

Jesus predicts one of them will betray him (v. 21), much to the surprise of the disciples (v. 22). A private exchange occurs between John and Jesus (v. 23-27). Jesus then tells Judas Iscariot to go about his business, and none of the disciples perceive any connection whatsoever between the prediction and this comment (v. 28-29). Jesus then announces the impending fulfilment of his mortal ministry (v. 31-35), wherein he tells his disciples he will be leaving them. Peter proclaims he will follow Jesus wherever he goes, even if it means death (v. 36-37). But, Jesus tells Peter he will be denying him repeatedly that very night (v. 38).

To the nonplused casual observer Jesus would be equating Peter (v. 38) with the predicted betrayer (v. 21). There are two reasons for Jesus doing this, one rhetorical and one practical. The rhetorical purpose for doing so is to contrast Judas Iscariot and Peter, which contrast is made obvious in subsequent events. Additionally, it serves as a rebuke against fault-finding. Jesus is talking about the necessity of the imminent betrayal, and Peter's primary interest is who the betrayer is and not the more profound meaning Jesus is trying to convey. Given Peter's interest in finding out who is at fault, Jesus censures Peter by predicting he is also at fault and will be similarly guilty of a kind of betrayal.

The practical reason would be to check Peter's zeal and prevent any kind of preemptive strike against Judas Iscariot that would preclude the imminent and necessary betrayal. Given Peter's interest in who the betrayer is (v. 24) and his willingness to act violently (cf. 18:10, see also Luke 22:38 for the disciple's having two swords at the ready, one of which was probably Peter given his attack on Malchus), the need to shield Judas Iscariot from him and the other disciples was real. If Peter acted hastily against Judas Iscariot in protecting Jesus, then that seeming act of valor could potentially disrupt the entire plan.

Comments on John 13

1 NOW before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having

now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's [son], to betray him; 3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. 5 After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe [them] with the towel wherewith he was girded. 6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? 7 Jesus answered and said unto him, what I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. 8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. 9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also [my] hands and [my] head. 10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash [his] feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. 11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for [so] I am. 14 If I then, [your] Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. 16 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. 17 If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

v1-17 John makes some parenthetical comments to indicate the setting has changed and to explain the context of the events he is about to portray (v. 1-4). Jesus knew the end was approaching (v. 1) and Judas would betray him shortly (v. 2), and this would result in the end and fulfilment of his mortal ministry (v. 3). He loved his disciples despite everything (v. 1), so he gives them one final private object lesson on leadership.

Jesus assumes the servant's role (v. 4) and goes about performing the seemingly menial task of washing the disciple's feet (v. 5). When Jesus gets to Peter, he refuses to allow Jesus to perform such a menial act (v. 6). Jesus tells him he doesn't understand what he is doing (v. 7) and if he doesn't allow him to wash his feet then he will have no part with him (v. 8). Peter continues to misunderstand and emphatically reverses his position by insisting that Jesus also wash his hands and feet (v. 9). Jesus tells him that is not necessary as those who are spiritually cleansed need only wash themselves physically, and most of them have, but not one of them (v. 10),

as Jesus knows the heart of Judas (v. 11).

After finishing the act Jesus resumes the role of teacher and explains the meaning of what he just did (v. 12). He tells them flatly that whoever aspires to be leader among them must humble himself and serve all of them (v. 13-14). Just as Jesus is their superior and yet has humbled himself to serve them, so must they do as well (v. 15). They are his servants, and if their master has done this, they must do it also (v. 16). They will be blessed if they do this (v. 17).

This straightforward sermon against self-promotion and self-aggrandizement is intended to counter the attitudes among the disciples, and all men, that gave rise to the events described in Luke 22:24-27, and also cp. Matt. 20:20-28, D&C 121:34-27. Jesus plainly tells the apostles they must abase themselves and humbly serve one another.

It is common for commentators to gloss over Jesus' requirement for humility and service and focus instead on the sanctification theme suggested in v. 10. This is because people have such difficulty humbling themselves and serving one another. It is easier to talk about religion than to actually practice it, hence Jesus' admonition in v. 17. The simple fact is Jesus requires his followers to live like he did.

v1 John characterizes the act Jesus is about to perform as one of pure selfless love. Even when He is about to be subjected to a cruel death, Jesus' motives are still untainted. This is also a teaching moment, where Jesus is teaching the apostles how they are treat each other in the Kingdom.

"Now before the feast of passover", this statement has caused some commentators, most notably John Lightfoot, to argue the supper in this chapter is not in fact the Passover Seder but is the same supper which occurred at Lazarus house (cf. 12:1-9) because it was "before the feast". This presumption causes considerable problems as John places a lengthy series of events in between the two suppers (cf. 12:8-50) and makes no overt effort to equate the two suppers. It also ignores the context of Luke 22:24-27.

A less problematic reading would be that John's intent is to say "At the beginning of the feast week of Passover". The Passover was a week-long festival, and the Seder meal was the start of that week. This is one of those cases where nit-picking a couple of words causes some people to ignore the

entirety of the rest of the surrounding text.

v2 Judas Iscariot had previously made the arrangements to betray Jesus, cf. Luke 22:1-6. John suggests in the previous chapter (cf. 12:4-8, also cp. Matt. 26:7-16) that Judas' motivation was petty revenge and greed. In starting the chapter with a reference to Judas, and the adversary, John intends to contrast this character with the selfless and humble character of Jesus.

v3 This parenthetical comment portrays Jesus' power and station as entirely transcendent. Where the apostles see Jesus as "master" and "lord" (v. 13), their physical Messiah, Jesus actually has the power of God. Jesus would shortly be returning to His Father, but before He does so, He humbles himself in extraordinary acts of service. The washing of the feet was Jesus' private humiliation, the Atonement and crucifixion were His public humiliation. In all cases He did it willingly.

v4 Jesus assumes the role of a servant, even the lowly dress. He does not maintain any pretension whatsoever of being a worldly leader or master of men.

v5 The act of washing another's feet in the present social context is effectively a slave's task (cf. 1 Sam. 24:41). For someone who is not a servant to perform such a task was considered humiliating. And this is precisely Jesus' point, as no Rabbi of that day would stoop to performing such a task as they considered themselves above such things.

v8-10 The Inspired Version (IV) clarifies the conversation between Peter and Jesus, as follows:

KJV

8 Peter saith unto him,
Thou shalt never
wash my feet.
Jesus answered him,
If I wash thee not,
thou hast no part with me.
9 Simon Peter saith unto him,
Lord, not my feet only,
but also [my] hands
and [my] head.

IV

8 Peter saith unto him,
Thou needest not to
wash my feet.
Jesus answered him,
If I wash thee not,
thou hast no part with me.
9 Simon Peter saith unto him,
Lord, not my feet only,
but also my hands
and my head.

10 Jesus saith to him,
He that is washed

needeth not save
to wash [his] feet,
but is clean every whit: and
ye are clean, but not all.

10 Jesus saith to him,
He that has washed
his hands and his head,
needeth not save
to wash his feet,
but is clean every whit; and
ye are clean, but not all.
Now this was the custom
of the Jews under their law;
wherefore, Jesus did this
that the law
might be fulfilled.

In v. 7, the IV softens Peter's rejection, and in v. 10 the IV clarifies the contrast of the physical washing and spiritual washing, and then adds an explanatory reference to the Law of Moses.

Peter's rejection of Jesus' act is certainly because of the esteem Peter held for Jesus. He did not want to subject Jesus to task that was considered among them to be humiliating. When Jesus tells him it is essential to accept this act, Peter quickly changes position and insists on a complete washing to emphasize his devotion. Peter still doesn't understand, so Jesus tells him that is not necessary.

The IV reference to the fulfilment of the Law is probably referring to both the implicit requirements of hospitality (cf. Gen. 18:4, Gen. 19:2, Gen. 24:32) and the ritual purification of the Lord's anointed (cf. Exod. 30:18-21, Exod. 40:30-32). As Jesus chose them as the leadership of his elect, they would be acting the same capacity Moses and Aaron did anciently, and were ritually washed and dedicated accordingly.

v10 "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet", Jesus is clearly referring to spiritual sanctification. Those who are spiritual washed only need to look after their physical cleanliness. In this particular context, Jesus is referring to ritual purity. When a person is spiritually pure, then the ritual purity of the Law of Moses is all they need to look after.

"ye are clean, but not all", Iscariot was present for the washing, so Jesus obliquely refers to his lack of spiritual conversion, cf. v. 11.

v12 In v. 4 Jesus assumes the garb of a servant. Here he resumes the garb of the Teacher, and then acts in that capacity.

v14 Jesus makes it plain his example is to be followed. The contemporary Rabbis taught the people the theory of religion. Here Jesus enforces the practical side of religion. Religion is not just something we are to talk about, it is something we are required to live and do. Jesus' teaching of the theory of religion is entirely without hypocrisy as he lived what he taught.

v17 "happy are ye if ye do them", the KJV "happy" would be better translated "blessed".

18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. 19 Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am [he]. 20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. 21 When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. 22 Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake.

v18-22 Jesus changes the subject and informs the apostles one of them will turn on him (v. 18). He is doing this beforehand as a witness to them that he is the Messiah (v. 19). Jesus then implicitly states that whoever rejects himself is in fact rejecting his Father (v. 20). He is disturbed by the implications of what he has just said, and then flatly tells them one of them will betray him (v. 21). The apostles are stunned by the revelation and look around at each other trying to figure out who it is (v. 22).

v18 Jesus quotes Ps. 41:9.

v19 "ye may believe I am he", the IV emends this line to "ye may believe I am the Christ". It is unlikely Jesus is doing this as a sign to them. Rather, Jesus is letting them know He consents to what is about to befall Him. He knew about it beforehand, and submitted himself to it. This is the real witness to them, that He had power to stop it and did not.

v22 The KJV translation reads awkwardly. A better translation

is:

The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one he was speaking. (NAS)

The disciples are baffled by Jesus' announcement.

23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. 24 Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. 25 He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? 26 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped [it]. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave [it] to Judas Iscariot, [the son] of Simon.

27 And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. 28 Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. 29 For some [of them] thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy [those things] that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. 30 He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.

v23-30 Peter wants to know who it is, so he has John, who is positioned to Jesus' front when reclining around the table (v. 23), ask him who it is (v. 24), and he does (v. 25). Jesus indicates He will discreetly reveal the individual by giving him something to eat, and does so (v. 26).

Jesus then dispatches Judas Iscariot to go and do his dirty work (v. 27), and none of the disciples, except John, are any the wiser as to him being the betrayer v. (28-29). Judas Iscariot then leaves into the night (v. 30).

It is plain from v. 22 the apostles took Jesus' comment seriously, and were at a loss as to who it was. Peter was interested enough to have John discreetly ask Jesus who it was. This sheds some light onto Peter's motives. Why did not Peter publicly ask Jesus across the table who it was? Probably because he wanted to deal with betrayer. That Jesus responded to John's question discreetly and not publicly, and then immediately dispatched Judas suggests He did not want to give John the opportunity to discreetly inform Peter of what he had just learned. Jesus did not want Peter interfering with the imminent events.

v25 "He then lying on Jesus' breast", John is not actually

leaning on Jesus. His position around the table is that his back is facing Jesus' front. The custom of eating at that time was to recline lying on the left side with the head towards the table and the feet outwards from the table. In this manner, those around the table had someone to their back and someone to their front. In this case, John's back was to Jesus' front.

v26 During the modern Passover Seder the unleavened bread is dipped into a bowl of salt water that usually contains bitter herbs. This is symbolic of the suffering and tears of ancient Israel. Whether this is what Jesus is doing or not is unclear, but it would be a good fit for the Passover Supper and it would be a discreet way of identifying the betrayer without doing anything indiscreet.

31 Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32 If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him. 33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. 34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

v31-35 After Judas Iscariot's departure, Jesus announces the fulfilment of the Father's plan is imminent (v. 31-32). This will require him to leave them for a time (v. 33). In his absence, they must love one another the same as He has loved them (v. 34). This is how people will know they are His disciples, if they live and act like He did (v. 35).

v34 There is nothing new about the commandment to love one another (cf. Lev. 19:18, Matt. 22:39). What is new is Jesus' disciples are to love one another as He has loved them. What is new is the example of Jesus, which his disciples must now follow. Previously there was no perfect example, now there is.

36 Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. 37 Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. 38 Jesus answered him, wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.

v36 Peter asks Jesus where He is going, and Jesus obliquely tells him he cannot follow (v. 36). Peter asks why, and zealously insists he will follow him even if it means his life (v. 37). Jesus questions Peter's zeal and predicts he will shortly deny him (v. 38).

That Peter is filled with zeal and willing to defend Jesus with his own life is without question (cf. 18:10-11). The problem is Peter presently does not grasp what is going on around him, and he most likely ends up confused and dismayed at what happens. Add with the very real possibility of an accusation of attempted murder, the result is someone who is forced to compromise or face brutal Roman justice.

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