

# The Lesson of the Basin and the Towel

## The Larger Story—part 4

John 13, April 25, 2021

John 13 is thought of as the beginning of the last message to His disciples. Imagine what you would want to say to your loved ones if you knew you would die within one week!

In walking the Larger Story something other than our immediate gratification or feeling better now needs to direct us and lead us. We will look at three character qualities to navigate by, one to avoid, and the North Star of walking with Jesus.

### **DAY 1: HUMILITY. Jesus and His Father and the connection with serving**

*John 13:1a It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.*

1. Jesus knows He will die within a matter of days. Notice how John describes His coming death and the effect of His death! What strikes you about how Jesus sees His death?

*John 13:1b Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

2. After thinking about His death, to what does Jesus' attention turn? What strikes you about that?

*John 13:2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. <sup>3</sup> Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. <sup>1</sup>*

3. If you've read John before, Jesus washing the feet of the disciples is a familiar story. What may not be as familiar is the context. Remember what Jesus knew about Judas, and yet Jesus also washed *his* feet! (verse 2)

4. Try to imagine yourself in His shoes. Think of someone who has been out to "get you," or has made your life incredibly difficult. You have a choice to do something really good for a few close friends but you must include this nemesis as well. How would you handle that?

5. How does Jesus handle that? (Re-read John 13:3).

6. What strikes you from today's devotional?

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The New International Version\*](#). (2011). (Jn 13:1–5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## DAY 2: HOLINESS. Jesus, Peter and the necessity of being clean from the stain of sin.

1. One of the inescapable realities of life is the effect of sin upon us. When our conscience is *working* we will experience guilt. In addition, we will *feel* the stain of sin.
2. Jesus uses this service of washing their feet as a metaphor not only of ministry but of **holiness**. When you put your head on the pillow at night, it is sometimes difficult to “erase” the stain of sin, no matter how slight it might be. We may try to *medicate* away the stain, or *dismiss* the stain by staying busy, or *numb* the stain by a fun activity, or try to *replace* the stain by doing something good, but that is not how the stain of sin is **removed**.

*John 13:6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to **wash** my feet?”*

<sup>7</sup> *Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”*

3. Peter, not surprisingly, misses the point.

<sup>8</sup> *“No,” said Peter, “you shall never **wash** my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I **wash** you, you have no part with me.”* <sup>9</sup> *“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”*

<sup>10</sup> *Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to **wash** their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are **CLEAN**, though not every one of you.”* <sup>11</sup> *For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.* <sup>2</sup>

4. There is an intriguing play on words in this passage. Every English word “**wash**” is a translation of the Greek word “*nipto*.” It is used in vv. 5, 6, 8, 10a, 12, 14. The meaning is to wash a *part* of the body. My mother used to ask me, “Seth, did you wash behind your ears? Did you wash your hands?” That *wash* is *nipto*.

5. But when Jesus speaks about being clean in verse 10 He uses a different word: **Katharos** which means pure, clean or clear. This Greek verb is used in the perfect tense which should be translated “cleansed, once and for all.”

6. What is illustrated in this episode are two types of spiritual cleansing.

- a. There is an initial one-time, once-for-all cleansing which is done at our conversion following repentance and faith.

*John 1:29 “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.”*

- b. There is an ongoing cleansing that is needed daily.

*1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The New International Version\*](#). (2011). (Jn 13:6–11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

### DAY 3: "HAPPINESS". Jesus and the disciples

*John 13:12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be **blessed** if you do them.*

1. I have the word "happiness" in quotations. It's because "blessed" does not begin with an "h" and because "blessed" has an odd meaning in our secular culture.

2. It's fascinating that if we make a simple flowchart of our three key words from John 13, the order is highly instructive!

Humility→Holiness→"Happiness" (Joy; blessed)

3. Think about the colossal amount of work God must do to change pride into humility, self-centeredness into holiness, and instant gratification into joy, true "happiness"!

4. What does it mean to be "blessed?" Several weeks we took some time to differentiate the difference between happiness and joy. Joy is very similar to being blessed.

a. To be blessed means that your inner sense of well-being is at *peace* no matter what your outer circumstances be.

b. It is to be anchored in God is such a way that there is something that can be at *rest* in you even when howling winds blow all around you.

c. The Beatitudes tell us that how we live is foundational to being blessed (Matt. 5:3-16)

d. Here, Jesus equates a life of serving, and particularly serving that seems menial as providing blessing, a heart at rest.

5. Walking the narrow road with Jesus is "playing the long game." It is the opposite of what Satan and our own sinful desires clamor for. We want instant gratification, to feel better now, to be "passionate" about our marriage, work, ministry, and service. We clamor for recognition and appreciation.

6. And yet, the narrow road of Jesus leads us in the opposite direction.

We delay gratification for a higher joy. We will realistically feel lousy when life doesn't go our way and that feeling leads us back to God. We are willing to do what needs to be done in our marriage, work, ministry and service no matter how passionate we may feel or not feel. We welcome obscurity as a gift not a punishment.

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

## DAY 4: HUBRIS: Jesus and Judas

1. Hubris means overbearing pride. Someone who has hubris *knows better* than you.

*John 13:18 ...But this is to fulfill this passage of Scripture: 'He who shared my bread has turned against me.'*<sup>19</sup> *"I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am who I am.*

2. Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9. He is describing what will happen, that one of the disciples will turn against Him. To the disciples that is unthinkable. No one saw this coming.

3. Jesus does two things in these verses. He says these words to the disciples so that when they realize the horror and treachery Judas committed they won't be "blown out of the water." Instead, they would look back on this very moment and remember that Jesus predicted this very thing, in detail. It will strengthen their faith, not weaken it.

4. As you read the rest of the passage (John 13:21-30) it may seem inconceivable that no one thought of Judas, but such is the case! Jesus gave just enough evidence of betrayal that only in retrospect would they recognize Judas as the traitor. In other words, Jesus protected the identity of the traitor!

5. The hubris of Judas led him down a trail of deceit, lies, presumption and pride. He "knows better" than Jesus what Jesus should have done. Do you see some hubris in you?

*Jn. 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."*<sup>35</sup> *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

6. Why is this a *new* command? Weren't we always commanded to love God and love our neighbor? Yes. a. What's new is a new object and a new standard.

a. The new object is "*one another*," and

b. The new standard is "*...as I have loved you*." It is a sacrificial love for the benefit of another at any cost to oneself.

7. Verse 35 is the keystone verse in this chapter. What is astounding is that God puts in the hands of His people living evidence of the reality of Jesus. The compelling evidence is the way they love one another!

8. When I was a young Christian one of the songs that resonated with us included a line that was repeated. "And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, and they'll know we are Christians by our love." The compelling evidence is not your church attendance, the level of your giving, the stands you take for righteousness, your leadership in a ministry, or your bible knowledge. All of those are important, but they don't impress the lost person.

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

## DAY 5: Closing thoughts on John 13

*John 13:31 Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. <sup>3</sup>*

1. The glory of God is the North Star of the Larger Story. Whenever we can "shine a light" on the character of God, His radical love for us, His extravagant mercy, the wonder of grace, His desire and purpose to prepare us for eternal joy, that is the direction to walk!
2. What I sense in this chapter is the nature of relationship He desires to have with us and for us to enjoy. Words like realistic, closeness, intimacy, and deep connection are illustrated in His speaking with the disciples.
3. The character flow chart: Humility→Holiness→"Happiness"
4. What we read this week is the beginning of what He wanted to leave with these men after His death and resurrection, which only underscores the importance of what we read!
5. The Larger Story parallels the Great Commandment of John 13:34-35.  
*Matthew 22:37-39 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind and all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*
  - a. First, the Larger Story is anchored in the centrality of a primary relationship with God. Second, the Larger Story finds expression in how we live our lives, particularly reflecting the character of God to people and activities in our daily life. Jesus illustrates both.
  - b. His relationship with "the Father" mentioned in v. 1, 3. Also, you sense His anticipation in His expression "*had come from God and was returning to God.*"
  - c. The expression of the Larger Story to others: "...knew that *the Father had put all things under His power.*" Jesus was living out the Larger Story. He is "on assignment" from His Father. Here, the expression is serving the disciples by washing their feet.
6. The irony presented reminds us that the Kingdom of God moves forward in seemingly tiny steps, like washing feet. I hear Christians say, "Well, what can I do? I can only do a little." You're in good company!
7. The irony of the Larger Story is that bit players, like you and me, play important though *seemingly* insignificant roles!
8. What strikes you from John 13?

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The New International Version\*](#). (2011). (Jn 13:31–32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.