

“Who’s the Greatest?”

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by Pastor Tim Dodson

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Luke 22:14-30 *When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. 15 Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; 16 "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the*

kingdom of God." 17 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. 21 "But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. 22 "And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" 23 Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing. 24 Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' 26 "But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. 27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. 28 "But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. 29 "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, 30 "that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

The record of these events from the gospel of John says in vs one 1 of chapter 13 that “*Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end.*”

Despite the future that Jesus was facing at this point in his ministry and earthly life, *and He clearly knew what was coming*, He still savored the moments of communion with His friends. Our text says that He had a “*fervent desire*” to have this Passover with them. I wonder if that is how we feel about the people around us that we call our community, our fellowship, our spiritual *family*?

The Feast of Passover, as well as Christ’s celebration of such, holds even yet today many of the elements of our traditional practices of communion. The Passover itself was and is a Jewish memorial celebration to look **back** to God’s redemption from Egypt. And the specific event of the “last supper” for the apostles in that upper room was looking **forward** to the coming cross and it’s ramifications, even if the apostles did not fully grasp all of its elements and nuances at that point. This Passover would no doubt be especially significant and powerful for Christ as well as the apostles, because on this Passover Jesus would play a critical roll. On this Passover, **He** would be the “Sacrificial Lamb.”

You see, each year the Passover feast encompassed a sacrificial lamb whose blood was placed on the homes of the Jewish people and death would then symbolically “pass over” them, as it did **literally** back in Egypt. But this Passover would be different. For on this Passover, **Jesus** would be that “pure and unspotted lamb.” It would be **His** blood that would shield them from death. **He** would be their sacrifice **and** ours so that mankind might live! This would be the last such meal He would have until we have it with Him in part 2 of this thing we call life. We will be **with** Him for the next gathering...one called “*The Marriage Supper of the Lamb.*”

We must note that in this process and practice of communion there lay aspects of both a vertical and horizontal dynamic. There is firstly the vertical relational manifest with Christ. A “remembering” of *our* “Passover” and the rescue from our own personal “Egypt.” One replete with a deliverance from the bondage of our own captor and life occupier!

But then there is also a “horizontal” aspect playing out both there in that upper room as well as here in our practice of communion today. For a Jew, to eat together with...*to “dip bread into the same bowl” as another*, held great significance. Such would...*in the mind of the average Jew*, render him or her a very part of whoever was eating with them. They would through this act, become a part of the others and they a very part of Him. This is why a Jew was quite careful who they ate with, and would never eat with a Gentile because of the ramifications that such an act would entail. Jesus however apparently had no such qualms, and often ate with Gentiles.

Thus there was a union...a “bonding” there in that upper room that day, one that was both an acknowledgment and a promise: **I am in you and you are in me.** I have got your back and I trust you to have mine. We are “one.” This aspect is why we seldom if ever practice communion with non-covenant attendees, because the act would be trivialized and would ring hollow in its true meaning. We are diligent to not let the practice fall into the mode of a church ritual, and we practice the “communion” of sharing full meals together as well as the traditional focused exercise of the act of communion.

We can easily lose that investment and the intimacy in the pomp and ritual of modern communion. Let us clearly remember the setting of this famous event. Jesus and His disciples had come together for a time of eating together, a time of fellowship between friends, between members of a family of God.

Jesus, seemingly desirous that such a moment of unity and fellowship would be a timeless element of the “body of Christ,” took a piece of the bread and “broke it,” representing not only His physical body, but the breaking of it upon the coming cross. It was this “broken body” that was offered up to be shared amongst the present apostles, as well as all of us who would follow. Once again, to “break bread” and dip in the common dish as Jesus did was significant in that to do so was symbolically joining with everyone at the table into a unity of “one flesh.”

He then took a cup of wine, gave thanks, and gave this to them also to represent the blood that He would shed on their behalf. Again, this offering was for us also. It was the purchase price for a “new covenant,” a new agreement or contract between God and man. One that would no longer be based upon animal sacrifices and personal works, but would be satisfied by the complete and eternal sacrifice and work of Jesus Christ. This was the covenant prophesied in the Old Testament: Jer. 31:31–34; 32:37–44; Ezek. 34:25–31; 37:26–28. Jesus was going to pay the debt for *all* men, for *all* of time. This was the “covenant of grace”.

In a world where men seek to leave a monument of bronze or marble, Jesus left something for his memorial that was far less tangible, but far more enduring. Jesus left an eternal legacy of redemption, peace, and joy that still remains unparalleled today and forever. When we take part in the act of communion, whether it be the traditional version or its greater and more casual aspects, we share in that historical act. We “remember Him,” and we re-confirm our union with Him and the brethren to our right and left.

As often was the case, the apostles went from the mountain top to the valley in a matter of minutes. Perhaps that is just simply the attack “M.O.” of Satan who must bristle at those high moments of worship and unity. The boys were one minute swept up into the “holy of holies” and the next were in the gutter bickering about who was the greatest! And this picture would simply be a sad testament of the maturity of the apostles at that point, if it were not so prevalent in today’s larger church. Yes the heart of man is indeed wicked! We can be so aloof to what is truly important. Jesus was approaching His crucifixion, His day of destiny, and the apostles were debating their own importance!

They, like most of us, were still stuck in the “now”, still living for the present world. They had just shared a profound moment of unity and communion at the “Last Supper” as Christ gave of Himself in one of the most beautiful pictures and monumental events in history. It was an “eternal moment.” And yet still, the boys didn’t “get it.” They, and so often we, just couldn’t connect the present with the eternal. They couldn’t see the “bigger picture.” Thus they fell victim to the attempted establishment of the proverbial “pecking order” of the worldly system.

Jesus knew what it meant to be the servant. Men generally seek position and power because they have none, but Jesus had both and yet He took the “low road” of humility. He could have reigned as a king, but instead He served as a “bond-slave.” He willingly and with purpose *served*. A voluntary servanthood to men. It is such a simple concept, but a critical element of our faith that gets lost so often in the muddle of modern religion. We push and pull and struggle to “be something” when we should be taking the “lower seat.”

Note the last phrase in verse 27: “*Yet I am among you as the One who serves.*” He was not saying He was nothing...after all, *He was God in flesh!* This statement says nothing concerning value, talent, ability, earthly status, or position. Such was not a matter of discussion nor debate herein. It says *one* thing only. That I *chose* to be a servant. In this is the key to being greatly used by God, if that is what we are truly seeking. But if we are seeking standing and prominence instead of service, we will never know all of Christ, and we will never be at rest in what God has called us to.

The world seeks to constantly strive for position. It doesn’t matter if it’s in our marriage relationships, our friendships, our work environments or something as silly and trivial as driving in traffic! All of these things can have negative impact on our lives, but when such a dynamic enters into our church environment and we try therein to “climb the ladder,” it can only lead to distress and ungodliness, and certainly division! We struggle so often to find the time and convenience to serve, but the focus is invariably on the *act* of service, when we should instead be focusing on adopting a mindset and lifestyle of a servant. It is not to be something we *do* only but rather something that we *are*.

It is notable and an encouragement to see that even though they had fallen short of the high standard of their calling, Christ would still place his anointing upon them for what lay ahead. While we never want to run to the end of our grace, it is good to know that God is faithful even when we are not. The reality is that our Lord chooses to operate with imperfect men. That is not meant to give you a long leash, but it is a blessed reality!

Thankfully they would be judged not by the shortcomings of their journey, but rather by how they would finish the race. Paul knew this truth. He writes in his first letter to the church in Corinth, “*Remember that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize. You also must run in such a way that you will win. All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*” (1 Co 9:24-27)

History tells us that in the years that followed the events recorded here, that all but John went to their deaths as martyrs for the faith. And John lived despite the best efforts of the enemies of Christ to put him down. Not one recanted under the pressure. Not one backed away from the truth. Every one of them “finished well”, even when that meant death. “*Finished well?*” Perhaps that should instead be our goal and focus instead of being the biggest, the fastest, or the first. Because it’s been said that “*nobody’s taller than the last man standing.*” Surviving. Remaining. Finishing. This is our answer. This is to be our goal. Even Paul understood this, as he openly spoke of his desire to “*finish well.*” To “*not be disqualified.*”

2Ti 4:6–8 “*As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his glorious return.*”

John 13 records another event that occurred after dinner that day. Jesus would take the lowest of positions in that culture and would kneel to wash the feet of the men there with Him. He was God in flesh, the very Savior of the world washing feet! When we do step up to serve, how often we want our service to be fun and exciting. But there was nothing so in the act of washing the apostle’s stinky feet! This would be His grand finale. As the curtain rises on what would be, by the measure of many, the last act of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the text makes what should be to us a very profound and enduring statement, ultimately a promise: “*...he loved them to the very end.*”

He knew that physically He would leave this world, but not without finishing what He came to do. Dying, He would, like the seed planted, grow and blossom, producing a thousand-fold kingdom of faithful followers, the beginnings of the heavenly kingdom. He knew He had to depart from them, but He “*loved them to the end.*” He would “love **us** to the end.”

Not just the end of His earthly ministry, for the original has more meaning than just that. It means He loved them to the *end*, the farthest and greatest level in which one can be loved. He loved them as He loves us, with no limit, no stopping, and with no measure. And to manifest that love, He served them. To manifest that love, He washed their feet. We say we love Christ and perhaps we say we love our brethren here in this fellowship. How do we express that love?

Despite overt hatred from the religious leaders and a bitter traitor in His midst, Jesus would manifest His love in humble servanthood. Many of us never find that kind of heart toward others. We must bear witness that such a humble servant’s love is the clear evidence of our reborn state and proof of His supernatural Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

The washing of the feet of the apostles, is just a kind of love and servanthood that some of us just cannot seem to produce. Many of us will never move beyond the ‘taking’ mode in our faith and our church participation. We love to **get** from Jesus, but because He does not possess us, we fail to ever give of ourselves *to* or *for* Jesus.

Jesus Himself knew what it was like to be blessed and glorified by being the *receiver* of humble service, when His feet were washed by Mary’s perfume and her very tears. But that was not the end of it for Him. He knew how to love in return by washing the feet of others. *God* washing *our* feet, Imagine that! Especially in the sad reluctance of our oft refusal to do the same for others.

The disciples were bickering and arguing among themselves. They were caught up in their own lives and pursuits, and had forgotten what they were supposed to be doing. And yet He still loved us to the end, or “loved us to the uttermost.” A love without end. With all their failures, faults and shortcomings, He still loved them and loves us. What does such a love as that do for you?

Even knowing that some among Him...*even some amongst us*, would ultimately betray Him, Jesus did not hesitate to express His love in a physical manner. Jesus did not merely pay lip-service as to His love for us. He lived it out, then died to prove its extent. His hour had come, just as it will for all of us. His time and our time of death and resurrection. I wonder if we will finish as He did?

What did this have to do with spiritual things? What did all of this have to do with God stuff? We often seek to sit and study and discuss highbrow religious things and call it Christianity. But Jesus was showing us that *faith without works is dead*. Love without action is empty and meaningless. Herein the line is deeply drawn between religion and Christianity. It was His *last* supper and it didn’t matter. He *still* humbly served the ones He loved. It was never about Him. It was always about *them*. It was always about *us*...

Jesus arose, laid aside His outer garments as He would soon lay aside His glory, to be the quintessential servant. The apostles would not lay aside their pride to be a servant. Many of us won’t either. The apostles didn’t understand the significance of what Jesus was doing. But they would one day. I wonder if they, like many of us no doubt will, looked back and wished they had been more of a servant when they had the chance. Peter, who initially resisted receiving such an act would indeed come to understand what Jesus was meaning. For one day he would pen 1 Peter 5:5, “*be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*” Who is the greatest?

Matthew 23:11-12 “The greatest among you must be a servant. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”