

Love That Passes Knowledge

HN/SS 22/1/06am

Reading: John 13, Philippians 2

Study Text: John 13:1-5

Sing Psalms: 118:1-6, 107:1-8, 107:40-43, 133

The public ministry of Jesus had come to an end. The focus of this gospel up to this point has been on the multitudes; on Jesus performing miraculous signs before the people and calling upon them to believe in him. He called upon them to believe that God the Father sent him into this world, that he is the Christ, the Son of God.

We have not been told much about the disciples, apart from their following Jesus in the beginning. This is in contrast to the Synoptic gospels where the disciples are taught by Jesus and sent out on missions. But from chapter 13 in John's gospel the focus shifts from the Jews in general to the twelve disciples. It is the last week, indeed the last day of Jesus' earthly life.

In this brief time Jesus prepares his disciples for life without their Rabbi or Master. He teaches them many things – about himself and about themselves, about the Trinity and about the future. In this chapter he demonstrates love, humble self-effacing love, before commanding his disciples to *love one another as I have loved you*.

Setting

Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover – *six days before the Passover* (12:1). At this major annual feast the Jews remembered the Lord who delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. The seven-day feast culminated in the Passover supper. The Passover lamb was sacrificed, roasted and then eaten in the home with unleavened bread. In this particular year the supper was set for Thursday night. The Jewish day began at sunset so it was Friday, the day before the Sabbath.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the supper referred to here by John was the actual Passover supper as recorded in the other gospels. John makes no reference to the institution of the Lord's Supper. This is a problem for those who place undue emphasis on this sacrament (some of course think that chapter 6 is about this sacrament). Maybe this is the reason why John does not refer to this sacrament. His focus is upon what the sacrament points to not the ritual itself!

The uncertainty is also based upon time markers in the text. For example Judas went out **after** this supper and the disciples thought Jesus had sent him out to buy supplies *for the feast...and it was night* (13:29, 30). What feast? Well, as already stated the Passover feast went for seven days but the supper was on one day. Verse two also creates some difficulty – *and supper being ended*. This can also be translated as *supper being in progress*, which seems a better reading in the context.

Jesus Knew Who He Was

What words are prominent in the passage before us? 'Knew' is one. Jesus **knew** a number of things about himself. Another word would be 'love', and we will come to this shortly.

Jesus knew that his hour had come. He knew where he had come from and where he was going. He knew that the Father had given all things into his hands. Such knowledge was important in the light of what Jesus was about to do.

We live in the so called ‘information age’. A vast array of information is available at our fingertips – thanks to the internet and Google! Scientific and technical knowledge is expanding so rapidly that we find it difficult to keep up. And yet at the same time ignorance is also on the increase – especially when it comes to knowing how to live. A doubting, sceptical mind has become a desirable attribute in our society. To be certain about anything is to be labelled arrogant or narrow minded. Science is continually revealing new things – ‘old theories give way to the new so we cannot be certain about anything’.

Information we have in abundance, but knowledge and wisdom about life is hard to find. No wonder life has become so uncertain and so unbearable, and many despair of life itself. We have indeed lost our bearings, knowing neither where we came from nor where we are going.

It was not so with the Prince of life, Jesus Christ. Jesus knew where he came from and where he was going. He knew why he was living in this world. Satan had tried to disorientate him and steer him in the wrong direction. The Jews attempted to undermine his work and his teaching. But Jesus kept his bearings because of this knowledge. He knew without doubt that he was sent by God the Father into this world and that he would in the fullness of time return to God. He was sent with a task to do and he was confident of completing that task as he came to his last hour.

Do you have such knowledge about yourself, or are you drifting along wherever life takes you? Without bearings it will be the devil and his human agents who will soon have you ‘drifting’ in their direction. The wonderful truth is that you can know, just like Jesus, where you came from and where you are going.

When you believe in Jesus and are ‘in Christ’ then you are going where he is going. *I know whom I have believed* said Paul. He knew that his life was in the hands of Jesus. He knew where he was going when he died because he was ‘in Christ’ (II Timothy 4:8). He knew the words of Jesus in this gospel – *I go to prepare a place for you* (14:2-4) and believed them. Do you?

Jesus knew that *the Father had given all things into his hands* or put all things under his power. What an amazing statement, especially coming as it does immediately after being told that Judas was going to betray him. He was about to be arrested and crucified by wicked men. How could it be said that God had given him all power? The power given to Jesus was not the power of the sword, the power of death (18:36). It was the power of love and of life. The kingdom of God is about *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17).

This certain knowledge about himself allowed Jesus to humble himself before men, and stoop to wash the feet of his disciples. Jesus knew who he was in the sight of his Father so did not look to men for praise or self definition. He would not commit himself to men for he knew what was in man (2:24, 25). How tragic is the celebrity culture in which we live, with men and women so dependant upon how they look, and what others think and say about them.

Jesus Loved To the End

This knowledge that Jesus had about himself and his relationship to the Father allowed him to face the pain and the shame of the Cross. It also allowed him to show the amazing love that we see demonstrated in this passage – love to the end or to the uttermost.

The discussion on the radio the other day was about revenge. A lady with a website called 'revengelady.com' was being interviewed, and people were ringing in to tell their revenge stories. Not one regretted what they had done but all told their stories with great glee – many concerned divorce. It seems that every day we are reminded of the depths of human depravity. It was Lamech, a descendant of Cain who first boasted *if Cain avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy seven fold* (Genesis 4:24).

If you were to ask fifty people now what their thoughts were – were they thinking of love or revenge – I wonder what your finding would be? What were the thoughts of the disciples as they reclined at the table for this supper? Luke tells us they were arguing about who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). They were probably looking at one another thinking 'who is going to wash our feet – such a menial task'?

People in those days wore sandals and their feet became dirty as they walked on dusty roads. So when they came to a house it was the custom for the host to have his servant wash the guests feet – or at least to provide water (Luke 7:44; I Timothy 5:10). But it was unheard of for an equal, much less a superior to wash someone's feet. So who was going to wash the feet at this supper? The water and the towel were there for the taking.

Jesus rose from supper and laid aside his garments, took a towel and girded himself (13:4). John was present at the time and he remembered every detail of what happened – no doubt they all did. All 24 eyes were fixed on Jesus their Teacher as he rose and disrobed before them. Dressed like a servant with a towel around his waist he poured water into the basin and began to wash and to wipe their feet as they reclined around the table. Peter protested briefly. Judas was still at the table.

What amazing love! How can we comprehend such love? Here is love that passes knowledge (Ephesians 3:19); love that suffers long and never fails, love that does not seek its own and is not puffed up. Here is humble, self-effacing love. Here is love that shows no concern for self, for personal image or reputation among men. Here is love that the world does not know apart from Christ.

Jesus left the glory of heaven and came to this world in the likeness of sinful man. He took the form of a servant, he came to serve, and this is what we see in this incident. Their 'Teacher and Lord' did what they were too proud to do. He called upon his disciples to go and do likewise.

Let the love of God drive all pride from your heart. May you be filled with the knowledge and love of Christ, and walk in love as your Lord demonstrated in washing the feet of his disciples. *Love one another as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples* (13:35).

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon