

# Afterwards you will understand

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn to the passage that we read, the Gospel according to John, chapter 13.

And we may read again, verse 6. Jesus came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, What I am doing, you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand.

And the words in verse 7, What I am doing to you, you, what I am doing, you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand.

When you look and compare the Gospel narratives, I think you will be struck by the fact that the Gospel of John is very different to the other three Gospel narratives.

And that is significant. In many ways the other Gospels were written from the perspective of being outside.

[ 1 : 42 ] But the Gospel of John is written from the perspective of an insider. And I think that is highly significant because of the unique place that John occupied in the affections of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is also another factor. He wrote his Gospel when he was an old man. He had many years to reflect upon the lessons and instruction and the experiences that he had enjoyed in the company and fellowship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if I could just make a comparison for people who have a huge interest in paintings, particularly great paintings, they go to view them in the galleries where they are on display.

And the same people you find go time after time after time to see these paintings. And you ask yourself, why are they going so often to see the same painting?

And the answer they will give you goes along these lines. That every time they go, they spend more time looking at the fine detail.

[ 3 : 19 ] And the more they see of the fine detail, the better they see the bigger picture. And I think the whole Bible is like that, but the Gospel of John in particular, because of the way in which it is written.

And in this particular context, John makes a comparison between the maliciousness and the evil intent of Judas Iscariot.

and he contrasts that with the loving desire and will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And not only does John contrast for us the attitude of Judas with the attitude of Jesus, but he also tells us how the power of darkness is at work.

and he is also contrasting the power of darkness, Satan, with the power of light, God, in the context.

[ 4 : 32 ] Because he says, during supper, when the devil had put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. Then he goes on to tell us of the unique knowledge that is possessed by Jesus.

Remember, John began his Gospel identifying Jesus as a person of the Trinity.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the Word was God.

And that is the emphasis and thrust of his Gospel all the way through to point us towards the identity of the person of Jesus Christ.

And here in this context, he confirms for us how Jesus is in possession of that peculiar knowledge prior to his crucifixion, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hand, that he had come from God, and was going back to God.

That's highly significant, because it underlines the emphasis that John has been placing on the identity of Christ throughout his Gospel narrative.

[ 6 : 09 ] And significantly, in telling us about this, it's as if he wants us to understand how Jesus is going to return to the Father.

And I think that is what lies behind the episode that John alone records for us here, because it's more like a parable.

It's telling us in visual form what Christ has done in coming from God and in returning to God.

God. And in parable form he is demonstrating this by the feet-washing episode.

As he enacts what it means to be a servant. And you remember, he came to serve.

[ 7 : 15 ] He came to minister. and that is set before us in the passage that we read here together.

The way in which John is able to demonstrate from what Christ enacted here that this in essence is a parable of Christ coming from the height of glory to the depths of humiliation and then again being ascended to the right hand of the Father.

So here in this passage you see him take the form of a servant, take the most menial position in the gathering amongst the disciples.

He rose from supper. John is telling us there were already seated at the supper table. So it wasn't before supper that he rose, but during supper.

Now, if you've been entertained by a host and your host or hostess rise from the table, they've either forgotten to put something on the table or there's something wrong.

If they rise from the table in the middle of a meal. Here is Jesus rising from the table and there was something very far wrong. And what was wrong was this. No one had washed the feet of these men who were gathered around the table.

[ 8 : 54 ] Why did they need to be washed? Because the roads were dusty and the kind of fruit wear that they wore was a kind of open sandal, so their feet would constantly be in contact with the grime of the roads that they traveled on, which were not much worse than the kind of roads that we travel on.

He rose from the table. Why did none of the other rise? Were they too proud to wash one another's feet?

Well, I suppose that's a possibility that you can't discount. But I don't think it's the main reason because Luke in his gospel gives us additional information about the disciples who were gathered.

There was a dispute. And the dispute wasn't about feet washing. A dispute arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.

That was the nub of the dispute that rose amongst them. Their focus was not so much on humility but on being great.

[ 10 : 11 ] They were not desirous so much of serving but at that point were desirous of being served them. What an un-Christlike spirit because the Son of Man came not to be served but to be served.

Who then would take the menial position of a servant? Now, before we begin tutting in self-righteous indignation, do you not see how like ourselves these men were?

Do you know how often do you or I say, that's not my responsibility, responsibility? That's not my duty.

That's the responsibility of this person or that other person or the next person, but it's not mine. I suppose the disciples could have said the same, but it was their responsibility.

And because they didn't take this position, they were avoiding and shirking their responsibility.

responsibility. And what comes across from this small gathering is who really wants to be humble?

[ 11 : 32 ] Who wants to take a lowly position? Who wants to serve? After three years as the companions of Christ, under the instruction of Christ, you have to say that the disciples displayed a most woeful ignorance of themselves.

And perhaps we all say, but we wouldn't do that. I'm not so sure. I'm not so sure. If you know your own heart, I'm not so sure.

So who rose from supper? The person, John says, of whom this is true. The person who knew that the Father had given all things into his hands.

And that he had come from God and was going back to God. In answer to the question, who rose from supper? None other than the Son of God in our nature.

Remember what I said about going to see famous paintings, to see the fine detail. Here is part of the fine detail woven into the fabric of the chapter in order to show us and to demonstrate to us the true identity of the one who becomes servant.

[ 12 : 54 ] He rose from the table for the express purpose of washing the disciples' feet. Now that includes washing the feet of Judas. There was no exception here, even although Judas was going

to be betrayed.

But there is a distinction between Judas and the rest. All the rest had been washed before with the washing of regeneration, but not Judas.

That's the distinction. They merely needed to have their feet washed in the spiritual sense. By contrast, Judas was still in possession of a heart of stone.

He had not received the heart of flesh. And so you see, in this parable that is enacted here, you see love on its knees in the person of Jesus Christ.

And Paul reminds us in writing to the church at Corinth and that demanding and searching chapter on love. And you remember what he writes, love does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant or rude.

[14:09] And in this extraordinary feet washing episode, Christ illustrates the apostles' definition of love.

Here was Jesus performing a living parable that showed his generosity, his humility and courtesy, but more especially, his love.

Giving dramatic, non-arrogant display of his non-goodness, of his non-jealous love, which never begrudges us any good.

So, I think that is the thrust of this food washing. And so, that leads Peter to cry out, almost in an absolute amazement, Lord, do you wash my feet?

As if Peter had been washing, in increasing amazement what was taking place around the supper, and he's saying, surely you're not going to wash my feet.

[15:26] and in reply, Jesus gives a hint, that although Peter did not understand what he was doing now, eventually, it would all become clear.

I do not think that Peter or the disciples at that moment had fully absorbed the already huge steps taken by the Lord Jesus Christ, which were so incredibly breathtaking, that he was found, putting it in the language of Paul, in human form, that he tabernacled for a period amongst men, that he ultimately would go to the dust of death, so that the sins of his people might be blotted out.

There was a whole lot that they didn't fully grasp or understand at that moment, and it took the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, and ascension to make it more clear to them.

So first I'd like to highlight our lack of understanding. There is much that Christ does of which we are all indeed ignorant.

And although this speaks exclusively of the food washing, I believe that what was said has a much wider remit or application, there is much that is hidden from our limited understanding.

[17:01] For example, matters that belong to the unrevealed will of God. Many events happen in our world, for example, that we cannot adequately explain or understand.

We may try to give a reason, but we don't adequately understand. Sin in the world is surely anomalous.

Do you have all the answers for all of these things that take place in our world? God is not the author of sin. He does not sin.

He doesn't constrain to sin. He doesn't induce to sin. He doesn't tempt to sin. sin. And so these words echo and re-echo when you reflect on these matters.

What I am doing now, you do not understand. So much beyond our limited, finite understanding. Many have seared the eyes of their understanding in looking into the fiery furnace of what God permits.

[18:08] as far as foreordination goes, your shorter catechism, God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

There is no exception to that, no matter what it is. It is all contained within that statement. He sees everything from the beginning to the end.

But who of us can say that we know or understand everything foreordained by God? And out of these depths comes this voice, what I am doing, you do not understand now.

We see but part of the pattern, a minute part. You know when a tweed is in the loom and it's been woven, you can see the part that is visible of the pattern.

You can see all the threads that go to make up the tweed, but you cannot see the whole in one glance. And much of what takes place in the providence of God we do not understand now.

[19:17] Providence is in life where they seem altogether dark. And God is saying to you and to me, what I am doing you do not understand now.

and when all will be revealed, I do not believe that one person will be able to say, didn't I tell you about this and why it wasn't this way.

But in keeping with the, in keeping the application to the actual context, let me suggest a two-fold application. you know, you ask yourself, what is so profound about the washing of dirty feet?

But then remember what Christ is doing. He is acting out a parable. There is great depth to what he is doing. And what I understand from his reply to Peter is that the things done during Christ's state of humiliation and love are not fully understood.

Attention has already been drawn by John and I mentioned it to the self-awareness that belonged to Christ. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, that he had come from God, was going back to God, rose from the supper.

[ 20 : 51 ] And you can see how this parable, this enactment shows how in some ways, in parabolic form, it sets before us what took place in the life of Christ.

He divested himself by taking to himself. And that's in essence what he's doing here. He divested himself of his outer garments.

And he wraps the towel around his waist and he takes the form of a servant. And in many ways that could be a graphic illustration of what Paul teaches in his letter to the Philippians in that great doctrinal statement when he speaks of Christ being in the form of God.

And so on. Taking the form of a servant. See, he divests himself of these garments. And then he tells them, he asks them the question, do you understand what I have done to you?

In other words, the implication is they ought to understand what he had done. At least on the surface, because he says I have given you an example that you also should do just as I have done to you.

[ 22 : 23 ] And the word, for example, in the original here implies something new. Not merely something to be emulated, but a lifelong pattern for the believer in life.

The washing of others' feet, of one another's feet. Peter writes in his letter of Christ leaving an example that you might follow in his steps.

Paul, writing to Timothy in his first letter, interestingly in chapter five, writes about the ministry of the widows in the church. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than 60 years of age, having been the wife of one husband.

And one of the qualifications that these widows were to have was this, that she has washed the feet of the saints. In other words, the feet washing is a pattern of life for the believer.

But they did not understand. John writes here about what Jesus did outwardly. inwardly. But he also writes about what Jesus thought inwardly.

[ 23 : 51 ] For it demonstrates, as I said already in parable, the purpose of Christ coming into the world. Here is the second person of the Trinity in our nature, and he divests himself of his outer garments.

You know, if the soldiers in Israel were staggered at the actions of Prince Jonathan.

Do you remember Jonathan on an occasion because of the way in which he viewed David and his friendship with David? And do you remember what he did?

He stripped himself of the robe that was on him, and he gave it to David, along with his armor. how much more so should the full impact of what the Prince of Glory is illustrating here have on us?

The Prince of Glory laid aside his outer garments, going down, takes a towel, ties it round his waist, down again, he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, down again, he wipes them with a towel, around him, down further, he is on his knees before sinners, love on his knees in ministering to the lives of those who were under his pastoral care.

[ 25 : 21 ] And then he resumes his seat reinforcing his authority and the honor that was rightly his. So here is Christ illustrating in parable what Paul teaches about emptying himself and taking the form of a servant and as Principal McLeod used to teach us in the college, he emptied himself not by subtraction as you would expect but by addition, by addition and taking to himself.

Now, who now in that little group at that moment was able to grasp the tremendous significance of this act? He is on his knees so that the names of his own people be written in heaven, a people whom John describes as his own, whom he loved to the end.

and people have great debates about the meaning of the word end here. Well, let me put it like this, it is every end that you can think of and which you cannot think of because his love is unending.

His love brought him ultimately unto the dust of death and at that moment it was beyond the grasp and understanding of the disciples.

But was anything that Jesus did understood while he was doing it? Our lack of understanding. But then notice their lack of understanding didn't hinder the efficacy of what?

[ 27 : 23 ] Of the Lord's work. What I am doing you do not understand now. Peter doesn't grasp the significance of Christ washing his feet.

But Jesus didn't say to him, now Peter hang on, since you don't understand what I will not wash your feet until you do understand. That wasn't a condition of feet washing.

He didn't say to him, you'll wait now until you fully understand and only when you fully understand will I wash your feet. That's not how Christ operates in the world, is it?

It's not how he operates in your life or in mine. The blessings that he outpours on your life and mine are not dependent on our understanding to enjoy to enjoy the benefits.

If it were so, there would be very few benefits that you and I would ever enjoy flowing in and through Christ.

[ 28 : 30 ] Perhaps I can illustrate it like this. For those who are mothers, perhaps some of you have been mothers longer than you care to remember, but when the children were very young, just infants, and you were washing the infant, not every infant liked to be washed, did they?

They would struggle and protest as only they could. They would cry and struggle against what the mother was doing.

But the mother doesn't wait until the child understands why they need constantly to be washed. It's a labor of love. And how many times is that true in the spiritual well?

The Lord in his tender mercy and love dealing with us for our good. And we struggle and we fight against him because we do not understand that what he is doing is for our eternal good.

Perhaps I can use another illustration. I know very little about mechanics of the motor engine. But regularly my car takes me to my destination.

[ 29 : 53 ] And for the car to do that it doesn't depend on my inability in this case to understand how the engine works.

Likewise noise in the spiritual rally, our inability to understand doesn't have a negative impact on the efficacy of spiritual powers.

what is more important is that we obey the Lord and love in return. There is so much that we don't understand.

And in my view, what we do understand is so shallow. And the deep things of the Lord's dealings with us are beyond our finite comprehension.

And I'm glad that that is so. because one day you will understand. If I can illustrate it again, do you remember in the Old Testament the incident that is set before us of Jacob, a man of God, yet you find him stating that he has observed the evidence which caused him to come to a false conclusion.

[ 31 : 13 ] My eyes have seen the bloodstained coat of my beloved son Joseph. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces. And later on, in the face of further apparent family loss, he wails self-pityingly, all this has come against me.

I cannot understand this. How can these things be for good? That's how Jacob talks love. In his sense of loss and devastation.

But it was for good, despite his lack of understanding. Joseph was on the shoe road to Pharaoh's throne and to provide him for his brothers in the land of Egypt.

And so it may be, in your providence, and in mine today, may be that you are experiencing trials and tribulation.

you are unable to understand. That does not matter. Why? Because in the words of the Apostle Paul, this light, momentary affliction is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[ 32 : 31 ] So be content to let faith reign and for knowledge to wait so that what you do not understand now.

Afterward, you will, says Jesus, understand. So our lack of understanding shouldn't be an impediment for our trust in Christ.

And you notice how Jesus places emphasis on what I am doing. It's not one of the other disciples who's doing it to them.

But what Jesus is doing, see, it is, the emphasis there is all on what Christ is doing.

but just a final thought. For everyone who lacks understanding, there is a most encouraging promise.

[ 33 : 32 ] What I am doing, you do not understand now, but afterward, you will understand. There's no sort of indefinite, indefiniteness about lack of understanding then.

Afterward, you will understand. And that afterward, in the context here, is within a short time frame. The surface meaning of the act was immediately made known. I have given you an example. And they were to follow that out as a lifelong pattern in their Christian life.

And again, an interpretation of the events didn't keep them waiting too long. After his resurrection, after his crucifixion and resurrection, more light was shed on this act of love.

But there are other matters with regard to the Lord's dealings with us that may be disclosed, yes, in the here and now.

[ 34 : 38 ] We cannot see the end. We cannot perceive the blessing. Everything may be dark. And there are many things we might have to wait until we get into the eternal realm before the mysteries that perplex us here are unraveled and made known.

The dark days, the days of unrelieved suffering, or whatever form it might take, the days of final and painful partings that leave us bewildered and perplexed.

We do not understand, and the great physician says here for our encouragement, to help us through, afterward you will understand. When he says in his word what I am doing, you do not understand now, in effect he is saying, trust me, I know what I am doing.

And afterward, you will understand. Peter is in glory tonight, and he understands now more than he ever did, why Christ performed this amazing action.

And when you arrive in the place of perfect, eternal light, where your sun never sets, then you too will also know why he did what he did.

[ 36 : 16 ] You know, if you could hear the narrative of those who have already entered glory, you might hear some saying something like this, I was traveling, a pleasant road, things were going well, blessings were my portion.

But then suddenly, I had to turn back. There was an obstacle on the route, and I had to turn back and travel a very different road, a painful road, a bumpy road, a road that wasn't so easy.

And I never understood why I had to turn back, until I arrived in this place, and the eternal Father said to me, oh, my child, had you continued on that road, then you would have come to a steep precipice, you would have fallen off the road.

But I blocked up your way, and I did it in such a way that you are protected from falling off the precipice.

You know, you will bless God more in heaven, I believe, for your sorrows, more than your joys.

[ 38 : 00 ] But you notice, there's a solemn note here, and I'm going to conclude on that. You will understand afterward.

We would like to understand everything today, wouldn't we? We would like to know every answer today to why things are taking place. But he promises, and you know, he never breaks a promise. He will fulfill the promise. But there's a solemn note to what he says. If I do not wash you, you have no part with me.

The essence and the necessity of being washed by Christ. Otherwise, we will never understand what he is doing now.

Let us pray.