

No One Takes My Life From Me

PART 9 - GATHERING

TEXT: JOHN 13:1-20 (ESV)



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Parenthesis

While the objective of this series is to make our way through the narrative of Jesus' last days before the cross, there are a few places along the way where I want to stop to take stock of some of the details that are more on the periphery, but still important to recognize. Aside from Jesus' arrest, the main event on that Thursday was the time He spent with His disciples in the upper room. We'll spend three weeks on this, but here in this first message I wanted to take a moment to take a sort of a roll call, remembering Jesus the host, and the men who gathered there that night for this last supper.

We're going to read John's account of how Jesus began this meal. The text is pretty straightforward, and I won't comment much on it much. Rather, today I want to read it as a jumping off point to make sure we don't miss the context of the time these thirteen men spent in the company of one another and of Christ. Their mission was just beginning, and as Jesus goes around the room, He dignifies their lives with this act of service.

John 13:1-20

¹Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand."

⁸Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.

¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. ¹⁸I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. ²⁰Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me."

Thirteen Men

Thirteen men filled the room. They had been together for three years now—years filled with wonder, struggle, honor and rejection. As they were about to eat their last supper together, Jesus wrapped a towel around his waist and made His way around the room, washing the feet of each of the twelve men He called His disciples. It was one final demonstration of His deep love for them—friends and enemy alike—and His passion to serve them with His life. This washing was only a foretaste of what He was about to do to make them clean. Let's take a moment to go around the room with Jesus and remember the men whose feet He washed that night.

JAMES AND JOHN: We'll start with two brothers who have the distinction of being given the nickname "The Sons of Thunder" by Jesus Himself. (Mk 3:17) In Luke 9 we read how when Jesus and disciples once came to town that didn't want them there, John and James, upset by this lack of hospitality, said to Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" On another occasion, they sent their mother to take Jesus aside and ask on their behalf if Jesus would let her boys sit at His right and His left in Heaven. You see something of the fiery personality of James, the elder, and his little brother John. James would later be put to death by Herod (Ac 12:1-3) and John would be imprisoned on the Island of Patmos. (Rev 1:9) These men who loved to be first would lay down their lives for Jesus.

MATTHEW, OR LEVI, SON OF ALPHEUS: Matthew first met Jesus while he was working his tax-collections booth. We know this because Matthew himself wrote about it in the Gospel bearing his name. Being a tax-collector meant he was a thief, a cheat and even a bit of a traitor to his own people, Israel, by making his living giving their money to Rome. When they met, Matthew invited Jesus for dinner. Tax-collectors and sinners, a kind of a necessary fraternity, all came and reclined at the table with Jesus. For Matthew, his life with Jesus began at a table filled with sinners, and now here, 3 years later, not much has changed except Matthew's understanding of who all fits under that label.

JAMES THE YOUNGER, SON OF ALPHEUS: There was another James, the Younger, possibly a reference indicating he was Matthew's younger brother, a speculation drawn from the fact that they're both called "sons of Alphaeus." (Mk 2:14, 3:18) James is the one we know the least about, a detail I find intriguing and instructive as we look at this entire band of disciples. The truth is, we don't know very much about any of them when you think about it. We get glimpses, suggestions of disposition, snippets of conversations, family connections. But what do we really know about their loves, dreams, sorrows or destructive tendencies?

We're left to assume James was a common man. We don't know him, but we do know his life was intertwined with Jesus' and he was one of only a dozen men in that room that night, full partner in the Gospel. But we know he was a follower of Jesus because Jesus wanted him to be. (Mt 10:2-4) All we don't know, Jesus knew. What we can't see, Jesus saw. This is enough. James is the believer on the other side of the world doing what Jesus calls His followers to do. You won't meet him this side of glory. Still, if you're a Christian you are a full partner in the same mission, called by the same Lord. James was the stranger you sometimes feel like. Remember, he has a seat at Christ's table.

PHILIP: Philip of Bethsaida (Jn 1:44) was the third disciple Jesus called, after Andrew and Peter. (Jn 1:43-45) He considered Jesus through the filter of what he knew from the scriptures, and came to enthusiastically believe Jesus was the Messiah Moses and the prophets spoke of. Once he believed this, he became a man who wanted everyone else to know Jesus too. It turns out, this is exactly the life Jesus was calling him to.

BARTHOLOMEW, OR NATHANAEL: Bartholomew carried himself with confidence and maybe even superiority, as seen in his first encounter with Jesus. When Philip, Bartholomew's friend, told him he met a man from Nazareth whom he believed was the Christ, Bartholomew shrugged, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" (Jn 1:46) Philip implored him just to meet Jesus and Jesus handled him pitch perfect. As Bartholomew approached, Jesus announced "*Behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit,*" (Jn 1:47) winsomely calling him out for disrespecting Jesus' hometown and even more for announcing it with such impunity, as if his observation was a universal point of fact. Bartholomew was stunned, "*How do you know me?*" Jesus' reply persuaded Bartholomew that He knew him well.

Though he came on strong, Bartholomew would relent when he knew he was wrong. His encounter with Jesus reads like two alpha males sparring for authority. Jesus has his number. Bartholomew regarded Jesus and agreed with Philip, "*You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!*" (Jn 1:49) Jesus called him to follow, saying, "*Truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God descending and ascending on the Son of Man.*" (Jn 1:51) Something good had come from Nazareth, but Bartholomew was seeing, as Jesus wet his feet, that Jesus' goodness would be punished before it would be rewarded.

THADDEUS, OR JUDE: We know little of Thaddeus. Just that he was the son of a man named James. (Lk 6:16) He was one of the men Jesus sent out to "*go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" proclaiming "*the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.*" (Mt 10:5-10) It was a mission that put Thaddeus in situations where he saw the Gospel work in people's lives, but he also saw many reject not only the message, but Thaddeus himself for speaking it. His relationship with Jesus was one of "doing" as much as "being."

THOMAS, OR DIDYMUS: Didymus means "the twin," which he probably was. (Jn 20:24) Though most know him for doubting the disciples had seen the risen Christ following His death, (Jn 20:25) he was not a perpetual nay-sayer. He was a man who took stock and made decisions based on the information in front of him. When Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His disciples, it was Thomas who asked where this place would be. (Jn 14:5) Though he was inquisitive, he was also brave. Earlier, when Lazarus died, Jesus and the 12 were far from Bethany where Lazarus lived because the last time they were in the area, the religious leaders wanted to stone Jesus. When Lazarus died, Jesus said He was going to Bethany, and it was Thomas who said to the others, "*Let's also go that we may die with him.*" (Jn 11:16)

SIMON THE ZEALOT: Like James the Younger, Simon's descriptive surname differentiates him from the other disciple by the same first name. He had ties to a revolutionary sect of Idumeans who hoped to incite their people to expel all Romans from the Promised Land. They considered themselves at war. Being that this was a voluntary sect, Simon was probably the disciple who steered conversations to politics more than the others because he saw his world through the lens of its political climate. Everyone here either is the type or knows the type.

ANDREW: Simon Peter's brother Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, and became the first disciple Jesus called. (Jn 1:35-40) He and his brother, fishermen by trade, were the first to hear Jesus say He would make them fishers of men. His name comes from Greek origins meaning "manly." Though Jesus called all twelve within a relatively short period of time, Andrew was already there when each of the other's came on, sort of the upper-classman of the group. His loyalty to John the Baptist and then to Jesus shows a personal resolve to be engaged in the proclamation of the Gospel. He was all in.

JUDAS ISCARIOT: By the time Jesus takes Judas' feet in his hands, Judas has already struck his deal with the chief priests. He figured he'd hand Jesus over soon, maybe even this night if it worked out. Our text includes that ominous statement that "*the devil already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray*" Jesus. (Jn 13:2) It's hard to know how Judas came to be one of the twelve, but he has now spent years in the company of Christ and His disciples, yet he never loved Jesus. Imagine this, Jesus knows what Judas is about to do. He knows, and yet here He is washing Judas' feet just as He did all the others. Both Judas and the final disciple we'll look at, Peter, move to the forefront of the story the Gospel writers tell about this last supper.

SIMON PETER: Peter was the second disciple to follow Jesus, right after his brother Andrew. (Mt 4:19, Lk 5:11) Peter was both a hero and a mess. One moment he refused to accept that Jesus had to die, (Mt 16:23) the next swore he'd die with Him if he had to. (Mt 26:35) Citing the Biblical data, one writer characterized him as "*impulsive,* (Mt 14:28) *yet cowardly;* (Mt 26:69-74) *hot-tempered,* (Jn 18:10) *yet tender-hearted;* (Mt 26:75) *insightful,* (Mt 16:16) *yet dense.*" (Mt 16:21-23) Peter, along with the *Sons of Thunder*, was given his name by Jesus. His common name was Simon. When Jesus asked the 12 who they thought He was, Simon said He was the Christ, the son of the living God. At this, Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, which means rock, saying upon the rock-solid foundation of that confession Jesus would build His church. Some have argued Jesus meant Peter was the rock He'd build His church upon, but Jesus' church is built on only one foundation—the Lordship of Christ. Peter did, however, become a rock, playing a huge role in the development of the early church. (Acts 2)

JESUS CHRIST: Part of the objective here has been to provide some background to the men in the upper room so you might remember this was a real meal which took place on a real night and everything leading up to it and following was just as real. And this brings us to the last man in the room—the host of the meal—Jesus Christ, the son of God, the son of man. There are times when you may wonder if any of this is real—times you feel you might as well be two-thousand years removed from any real encounter with Jesus. Remember what He is preparing His disciples for—to bring the Gospel of His astonishing grace to your ears, saying, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.*" Christmas and Easter—the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus—are as real as the men gathered around this table, as sure as you've heard the Gospel they proclaimed.