

GOING DEEPER

John 13 recounts the events that unfold during the disciples' Passover meal. The opening of the chapter functions as a prologue to the Upper Room Discourse, building dramatic tension and highlighting the weight of what Jesus will say in 13:31-35. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that this is a farewell address. Jesus washes the disciples' feet as an example of humble love (13:4-5), reveals His betrayer (13:21-30), and sets in motion the events that will accomplish His mission of redemption (13:31-35).

Throughout his Gospel, John carefully develops the theme of time. The movement of the story follows the Jewish festival calendar (2:23; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 10:22). To appreciate this, imagine a first-century pilgrim journeying from a small Galilean village to Jerusalem for Passover—the annual celebration of God's deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. The roads are alive with travelers. The air carries the scent of roasting lamb and the hum of voices recounting God's mighty acts. Anticipation builds as Jerusalem comes into view and the vista of the temple rises above the city. The calendar was not merely a schedule; it was a rehearsal of redemption.

Yet, throughout the Gospel, Jesus speaks of "His hour" (2:4; 4:21; 5:25). This hour is the culmination of His messianic mission. In John 13, these two markers of time converge. As Passover arrives, so does Jesus' hour. The festival that remembered God's past deliverance now becomes the stage for God's ultimate act of redemption. The moment of fulfillment has come.

At this symbolic meal, Jesus redefines glory through an astonishing act of humility. In the Upper Room, He occupies the seat of highest honor. With the disciples around Him, Jesus rises from His position, removes His outer garment, wraps Himself with a towel (the attire of a slave) and begins washing the disciples' feet.

In the first century, foot washing was an act of hygiene and hospitality that conferred honor upon guests. It was customary that this task would be performed by a servant or slave. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He willingly took the lowest social position in the room.





This humility flows from authority. John tells us that Jesus acted “knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands” (13:3 ESV). His sacrificial love is rooted in His relationship with the Father and full awareness of His mission. Significantly, the verb John uses for Jesus’ removal of His garment, “laid aside,” (13:4 ESV) is the same verb used in John 10:11 and 10:18, where the Good Shepherd “lays down” His life for the sheep. The One who lays aside His robe in service is the same One who will lay down His life in sacrifice. John’s language invites us to see the foot washing as a living parable of the cross.

In response, the disciples are stunned, and Peter gives voice to the confusion (13:6-9). Through His exchange with Peter, Jesus reveals the profound meaning of His action. The foot washing expresses His enduring love (13:1). It foreshadows the cleansing from sin accomplished through His death. It provides an example for His followers: “...you also should wash one another’s feet” (13:14b). The cross-shaped love of Christ is to become the pattern of the community He forms.

The tone of the conversation then darkens as Jesus speaks of betrayal. He is neither surprised nor passive; His foreknowledge reveals His divine authority. He is also “troubled in spirit” (13:21), displaying His full humanity. The tension intensifies as the disciples question one another. Jesus identifies the betrayer by offering him bread, a gesture of honor and intimacy. With that act, the chain of events leading to the crucifixion is set into motion. John closes the scene with chilling simplicity: “And it was night” (13:30b).

As Judas, the betrayer, exits the Upper Room, only the faithful remain. Jesus now speaks openly of glory. Paradoxically, His glorification will come through betrayal, suffering, and death. But in this moment, Jesus gives a new commandment: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (13:34b). This intentional love would become the defining mark of His followers.

Peter, however, is not ready to grasp Jesus’ plan. With sincere but misplaced confidence, he declares that he will “lay down” his life for Jesus. His words echo the language of the Good Shepherd. Yet, Jesus gently exposes the gap between Peter’s zeal and his readiness. Jesus predicts that before the night’s end, Peter will deny Him three times. Only later will Peter understand that true courage flows not from self-confidence but from grace.

John 13 invites us to behold the glory of Christ, not in spectacle, but in sacrificial love. The King kneels. The Shepherd will lay down His life. A new people will be formed in the pattern of His humility.