

John 13.12-20—Jesus' Messengers are lowly slaves

I. Introduction

- a. Just before Kimberly and I were married, I started working at a clay company. My job was in the mill not the mining. In the mill, we would grind up the clay and put it in 50 lb. bags and we also loaded all the trucks or railroad cars that needed to be filled.
- b. My first job in the mill was bagging and driving a forklift. There's not much room for advancement. The next move up was to be the mill operator who would set the mill up for the particular grind, test it, make sure the bags weights were right, fix the stacking machine and then make sure the bagger and forklift operator did their job.
- c. We all had to wear a hardhat which were white but the first year of employment you had to wear a red hardhat. About 8 months into the job, I was asked to bid on the mill operator's job for second shift. Naively, I did and got the job.
- d. I soon found out that some of the guys who would be working for me didn't like it. They had been there for years but they didn't want the mill operator's job. They also didn't want a red hat telling a white hat what to do.
- e. I knew I didn't need to tell those guys what to do. They already knew their job. So, I set out to do my job and do my best to help them do theirs. Lunch breaks were optional it seemed but I would take their place so that they could have a break. Over and over again I would just simply serve them.
- f. One guy in particular who was very vocal about me being the mill operator I soon noticed that he would often take care of my responsibilities when he had some downtime. Even in the workplace, humbly serving others often results in humbly serving one another which makes for a very efficient workplace.

II. Main Point

- a. It seems pretty clear that Jesus marks off what is most important here by "truly, truly" and states that a servant is not greater than his master. But this section also ends with the same marker. Here we understand that a messenger of Christ who obviously has a message (the gospel) to be received must also be a humble servant.

III. Outline (how does Jesus create humble messengers?)

- a. Jesus teaches with Questions
- b. Questions lead to Understanding and Doing
- c. Jesus guards their faith

IV. Exposition

- a. John continues the story from last week. I think it would be easy to stop right there. I mean, we like being served. Let's not mess up a good thing here by going further with this. But Jesus doesn't stop there. If the washing of the disciples' feet was more than removing the dirty from their feet then, fine, there's really no implications that will follow. But, it did mean more. This scene pointed to the work of the cross that lay only hours away. It pointed to the ongoing need of repentance as we redeemed sinners continue to sin. So, Jesus takes it further by asking questions so that THEY will know if they understand.
 - i. We need to maintain that previous image of Jesus lowering himself before his disciples and wiping their filth on himself. If this were normally the act of a house slave, they would have met them as they entered the house, washed their feet and then scurried away out of sight. But Jesus doesn't do that. He remains with them.
 - ii. V. 12 literally begins with, "Therefore, when...". "Therefore" is signaling to us that there are more implications to what Jesus has done.
 1. We could read this sentence like this: "Therefore Jesus said to them...".
 - a. But what we have between is very important to see. So, when Jesus finished washing their feet and put on his outer garments back on and reclined again at

the table...he said nothing...expected nothing...you figure it out...I've had enough of you...you still don't get it...I'm tired...I'm done...I've served my time.

- b. Will he love them to the end? What does it look like to love them to the end?
 - i. For starters, if the simply image of wiping their filth on himself was helpful, then seeing Jesus cover their filth with his outer garment is a simply atonement like image too.
 1. Isn't that amazing! Not only did he take my filth upon himself, it's now hidden. (Col. 3:3) ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
 - ii. The second way he loves them is by not leaving. He remains with them at the table. It literally says he reclined again.
 1. You get this brief image that it's finished. It's a creation/new creation image.
 2. (Gen. 2:1-2) Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.
 3. He will now transfer the work to his disciples and someday it will be finished and we will rest.
- iii. How will he do that? First, let's not miss the simple means of speaking. Silence will not bring about the implications of the washing. In other words, you are clean and because you are clean I have work for you to do.
 1. Jesus is not asking so that he will know but rather so the disciples will discover if they understand.
 - a. The danger is, they could skate under the radar without revealing the fact that they do not understand. They might not even realize that they do not understand.
 - i. Questions are extremely important. In fact, this is a huge part of making disciples.
 - ii. Jesus is about to call them to humble service to one another. It takes humility to ask questions. Indeed, we should ask questions with humility. It should come from genuine concern and with the hope of understanding and walking in the truth.
 - iii. AND it takes humility to be asked questions, too.
 1. I want asking questions...caring for each other's souls...to be normal practice for us here at UHBC.
 2. Now, remember, I'm trying to explain how Jesus brings the implications of the washing about in his disciples by asking questions. A response is part of the process. And silence is a response.
 - a. Notice, when Jesus asks, we never hear the disciples answer him.
 - i. That's clear but what's not clear is how long was the silence between verse 12 and 13? Maybe there was no silence. Maybe Jesus answers the question for them which he does.
 - ii. However, I want to say that there may be times when disciples do not answer our questions.
 1. Be patient. Be intentional. Be genuine. Be wise.
 2. Pray for them. Wait. Pick your moment. Try again.
 - b. Maybe because of the silence, Jesus affirms things they already understand.

- i. Notice in verse 13: You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.
 - 1. Did you see what he did there? He's reminding them of what they already understand and that it's right.
 - a. It's right because Jesus is Teacher and Lord.
- ii. Now he builds on that in verse 14 with an implication for what they already understand.
 - 1. (Jn. 13:14) "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.
 - a. Sometimes when the disciple doesn't respond, you have to help them. Jesus is actively working on their behalf and he does the same for us.
 - 2. Jesus also adjusts their understanding. Maybe this is a stretch but when he swaps the order of teacher and Lord to Lord and teacher, I think he is correcting that for them.
 - a. Lord can be a term of respect, like we use sir.
 - b. Anyone could hear it either way but in the context of the bible, we know the long history of the word ascribed to God as Lord. It was inserted in place of God's name, YHWH.
 - c. The order matters.
 - 3. So, if the Lord has washed their feet (not merely their teacher), then they ought to wash one another's feet.
 - a. My guess is that they had never washed anyone's feet. It had always been something someone else did for them.
 - b. And I don't think they would have any trouble washing Jesus' feet but he doesn't ask them to do that but rather each other's.
 - c. I think we need to ask the question, "So does this mean we should be practicing foot washing on the level of baptism and the Lord's Supper?"
 - d. It would appear so if this was the only text we had. However, the rest of the NT doesn't seem to prescribe this on that level. There's only one other place it even comes up when Paul instructed Timothy on how to discern whether a widow should be added to the list for financial care.
 - e. And, that's not something we have need of in our culture. I don't think it's wrong to do but I believe we should understand this to mean "no act of service should be beneath you."
- iv. To make disciples, we will need to ask questions. We need to be asking about matters of the soul as well as the physical needs. It's possible that you have gone your entire life without anyone asking you if you understand what Jesus has done to you. We should go beyond the "Hi, how are you?" "I'm good" dialogue. Where have you been? Where is your family? What are you learning in the word? How is your soul? These are only a few things that need to be common among us.

- b. Jesus used questions to bring about understanding. But still, that isn't far enough. Knowing must lead to doing.
- i. In verse 15, Jesus states the reason why they should wash one another's feet... ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.
 1. Jesus is the perfect teacher. He shows them *and* tells them. And some things are better caught than taught. I personally benefit more from seeing it than someone telling me what to do, only.
 2. I learn better that way. It put flesh on the instruction.
 3. But not only that, if the Lord Jesus did washed their feet, then it breaks down all their cultural norms that restrain them. It actually frees them up because they were often bound by ingrained privileges that they were not even aware of.
 - ii. I'm certain that's why Jesus marks off verse 16 so clearly because we are prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. Take note of what Jesus says.
 1. (Jn. 13:16) ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.
 - a. Let me point here that Jesus uses two comparisons. The disciples are slaves *and* messengers.
 - i. Messenger is the same word for apostle. I don't think Jesus means it the way we come to understand it in Acts. That's why messenger is used.
 - b. The comparison can be understood on the most basic level of life as they know it as well as the highest level.
 - i. They know what Jesus means. God designed the world to work by way of authority and submission. It did not mean that either category was less human than the other. However, there are different roles in life.
 - ii. Parent/child and husband/wife are normal categories in which we understand the world God designed. It would not be right for the children to be in authority at home.
 - iii. But we have difficulty with submission and authority. Sometimes for good reason when people abuse their authority. A wife is never to submit to a husband that would ask her to sin. She has a greater authority she must submit to first and foremost.
 2. It will be very important for the ongoing mission of Jesus through his church that we think this way: (Rom. 12:3-5) ³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
 - iii. Yet again, Jesus appeals to things they already understand to help them answer the question he has asked and see the implications of what he has done to them.
 1. (Jn. 13:17) If you have known these things, blessed are you if you do them.
 2. Step by step he has brought them along. Now, he ties their understanding with doing.
 - a. What Jesus has done here makes sense to them. These disciples have the same problem we all have. We don't always do what we know to be right. That's one reason questions are so important.
 - b. We are often unhappy and we don't know why. But the fact is, happiness/blessedness is conditional on obedience.
 - c. For example, (Acts 20:35) remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

- i. This doesn't make sense in the world's economy. The world says you will be happier if you keep all of it. I have been in some very difficult financial situations and we trusted the Lord by giving more in those times instead of keeping. The Lord tested us but he provided in unbelievable ways.
 - iv. But how do we gladly obey the Lord? I can tell you this, when the joy of the Lord is my strength I give more, share the gospel more, repent without delay, I see the needs of others, I'm not preoccupied with myself, and not easily offended. I could go on but it comes down to this: I don't usually have an obedience problem. I have a love problem. If my heart is bound up in Christ, by hands are busy doing.
 - 1. We are called to stir one another up to love and good deeds. That means you will need to have further conversations after the service and during the week. And I think the stirring up doesn't always involve admonishing the idle but also saying let's do this together.
 - 2. There are examples among us who humbly serve one another. Imitate their faith and ask them to help you.
- c. We move into the final section of this passage. Jesus makes clear that he was not speaking of all of them. There's a real threat looming among them that would undo all that Jesus had taught them as he prepares to leave. So, he tells them of the betrayal before it happens so that they might believe. In other words, he's loving them to the end.
 - i. (Jn. 13:18-19) I am not speaking of all of you; I have known whom I have chosen. But so that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'¹⁹ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that whenever it does take place you may believe that I am
 - ii. There's a huge emphasis on Jesus speaking to the disciples. Five times in some form "I say to you."
 - 1. He tells them what they need to hear so that they will believe he is "I am."
 - 2. He's not just another teacher. He is YHWH.
 - 3. He isn't figuring this out as it happens, he knows all things.
 - 4. When he is betrayed by one of the Twelve, it was part of the plan. He chose them with full knowledge of where this was going. It wasn't a mistake on his part. Everything is happening according to scripture.
 - a. Which is why Jesus quotes part of Psalm 41:9.
 - i. This is the ultimate treachery. The one who eats his bread bites.
 - ii. Jesus had just tenderly washed his feet and now it is lifted to strike him.
 - iii. When this takes place, Jesus' words are working to sustain the faith of his disciples through that day of trouble that Psalm 41 talks about and is coming in a few hours. He keeps loving them to the end.
 - iv. And finally, he ends with this. (Jn. 13:20) "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."
 - 1. Jesus is about to leave. These disciples will be called to carry on the mission he began. They have a high calling. A calling that seeks to represent Christ. They are to make disciples of Christ. These ambassadors have a story to tell—the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Those who receive this gospel, receive Jesus. Those who receive Jesus receives the Father.
 - 3. Jesus has laid out what kind of messengers they are to be. To receive the message of the lowly Jesus, it needs to come from lowly servants.
 - 4. It matters how they represent him. It matters how we represent him.

5. We too have a high calling as disciples of Christ. This high calling would have us to be lowly and humble servants. Pride doesn't represent our humble King.

V. Response

- a. I want us to respond this way. Joshua will come and sing our last song. Part of it we will remain seated and low before the Lord. Let's hear the words of this song and ask the questions that it asks for ourselves.
- b. For the last part, Joshua will ask of to stand. If you know the words, join in. If not, just listen and pray.