



The Cross in Prophecy

“Knowing That His Hour Had Come”

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:1–5).

Regarding the conversations and events that took place in the upper room on the night of Jesus’ arrest, John’s Gospel gives us information that is not found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. This book keeps us in the upper room for five chapters: 13 through 17. While the Synoptic Gospels focus mainly on the establishment of the Lord’s Supper, John emphasizes the conversations that Jesus carried on with His apostles as He prepared them for this awful night, His death, and His going back to be with His Father.

Jesus believed that it was important to begin this evening, one of the most significant evenings of His earthly ministry, by washing His apostles’ feet. The humility of this washing conveyed not that Jesus was humbling Himself in His approaching death, but that Jesus—as “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of [God’s] nature” (Hebrews 1:3a)—was revealing what God is like. The washing of the apostles’ feet reflected the humility of God, for it was in God’s loving nature to condescend to meet human need by providing the sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

At this time in Palestine, it would have been customary for someone, most likely a slave, to welcome the group by washing their feet that had become dirty from walking the dusty roads and lanes as they had made their way to this

place. This meeting was a private one, taking place behind closed doors and removed from the attention of the populace, some of whom always seemed to be searching for Jesus. Apparently, no servant was present, so the washing of feet would have to be done by someone within the group. Instead of thinking of serving each other, the apostles had been having heated discussions about who would be greatest in the coming kingdom. Their emotions had become inflamed by the attempt of James and John’s mother to secure a position at Jesus’ side for her sons and by the two brothers’ comments on the matter (see Matthew 20:20–24). It seems that a dispute was occurring just before Jesus arose to take care of the menial task (Luke 22:24–27).

When Jesus arose to wash their feet, He had in mind much more than just a moving demonstration of how these disciples were to treat one another. He actually would be conveying to them the truth that God has a servant heart, a truth that they would come to understand more clearly when they could finally grasp the meaning of His death upon the cross.

As a prelude to the washing of the feet, John explains what was on Jesus’ mind. The text shows us what sustained, constrained, and comforted Jesus in this dark hour.

Jesus found strength by looking at His future. He knew that the time for His suffering was

approaching. John said, “Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father” (John 13:1b), arose and washed the apostles’ feet. The cross did not take Jesus by surprise, slipping up on Him and catching Him unaware. He chose the time, the way, the place, and the circumstances of His death. He had purposefully stayed out of Jerusalem until the time came for Him to die for our sins. He had been slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8); it had been an actual fact in the mind of God, and now, according to God’s timing, Jesus would accept this hour that would bring into reality that which had always been actual. All people are mortal, but it is not until they die that their actual mortality becomes a physical reality. Jesus, as the key to God’s foreordained plan for the salvation of the world, would implement that plan in this hour that had come upon Him.

Jesus was sustained by looking at His relationship with His Father. He knew the kind of relationship He had with His Father. He went into this hour “knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God” (John 13:3). He was God the Son. He had come from the Father’s side, and He would soon be returning to that eternal place. He had “existed in the form of God”; but having “emptied Himself,” He had taken “the form of a bond-servant” (see Philippians 2:6, 7). In His coming, He had expressed in His earthly life the true servant-nature of His eternal character. He, the serving God, had become a serving man. He had been in the beginning with God and was God; He had become a man, and soon He would go back to the Father. After His resurrection, His statement to Mary was “. . . I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God’” (John 20:17). As Jesus went to the cross, He went in the full consciousness that the Father had sent Him to pay the ransom for our sins. His relationship with God the Father sustained Him.

Jesus found comfort by thinking of His followers. Jesus loved His chosen ones to the very fullest and to the very end. John said that Jesus, “having loved His own who were in the world, He

loved them to the end” (John 13:1c). The word “knowing” is not used at this place in the text, but it is implied. He knew His relationship with the Father, and He knew His love for His apostles.

Merrill C. Tenney listed seven characteristics of the love that Jesus had for His apostles, all of which are evident in this upper room:¹ (1) He had a love that could not be quenched by evil. One was seated at the table who was betraying Him: “During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him” (John 13:2). Peter was going to deny Him, and the others were going to flee; but Jesus continued—as He does with us—to love them. (2) It was a love that was not weakened by the fact that He possessed exalted powers. He was all-powerful, but He loved people humbly and gently, as One who had become one of them. (3) The love of Christ transcended the barriers of social class. Even though a servant would ordinarily wash feet, He arose and did it out of love for them. (4) The love of Jesus was an active love. He did not just talk about it; He manifested it in the service that He rendered. (5) His love was dedicated to cleansing them. Although the apostles did not grasp this truth, Jesus was preparing them for His death, through which they would be washed clean from sin. (6) His love for His followers provided a continual cleansing. He would die for them so that they could be continually cleansed through His blood as they lived in Him. (7) He possessed a love that taught His loved ones the truth. He confronted Judas and Peter with what they were going to do. He did not coerce them, but He lovingly taught them, putting a divine roadblock in the way that they were traveling. This kind of love overwhelms the objects of it and comforts the one who gives it.

In this sacred moment, in this evening before His arrest and trial, what was Jesus thinking about? What was on His mind? He thought of His relationship with the Father, the future that He was entering into, and the love He had for

¹Merrill C. Tenney, *John, the Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 198–200.

His followers. These great truths gave Jesus strength, purpose, and endurance. In the midst of great trials, it would likewise be a great comfort to us if we would remember to think of our relationship with the Father, the future that we have through God's love, and the love that we have for our physical family and the extended family of the church.

Eddie Cloer



“And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called “Benefactors.” But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves’” (Luke 22:24–27).