

John 13:1-18

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon on John 13:1-18 calls believers to embody humility and service, following Christ's example of washing the disciples' feet and forgiving even those who betray us.

Scripture: Genesis 7:1, Matthew 5:44, John 13:13-14, John 13:16

Topics: "Humility And Service", "Christian Forgiveness"

Description

John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of humility and servanthood by reflecting on Jesus washing His disciples' feet, teaching them to serve one another with love and humility. He highlights the significance of not exalting oneself above others and the need to imitate Christ's example of selfless service, even towards those who may betray or harm us. Chrysostom urges believers to respond to wrongdoing with forgiveness and kindness, following the examples of Joseph and Moses who displayed patience and love towards those who wronged them, ultimately showing that true virtue lies in overcoming evil with good.

Transcript

And He took His garments, and having sat down again, said to them, Know ye what I have done to you? And what follows.

1. A grievous thing, beloved, a grievous thing it is to come to the depths of wickedness; for then the soul becomes hard to be restored. Wherefore we should use every exertion not to be taken at all; since it is easier not to fall in, than having fallen to recover one's self. Observe, for instance, when Judas had thrown himself into sin, how great assistance he enjoyed, yet not even so was he raised. Christ said to him, One of you is a devil John 6:71; He said, Not all believe John 6:65; He said, I speak not of all, and, I know whom I have chosen John 13:18; and not one of these sayings does he feel. Now when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and sat down, He said, Know ye what I have done unto you? He no longer addresses Himself to Peter only, but to them all.

John 13:13

You call Me Lord and Master, and you say well, for so I am.

You call Me. He takes to Him their judgment, and then that the words may not be thought to be words of their kindness, He adds, for so I am. By introducing a saying of theirs, He makes it not offensive, and by

confirming it Himself when introduced from them, unsuspected. For so I am, He says. Do you see how when He converses with the disciples, He speaks revealing more what belongs unto Himself? As He says, Call no man master on earth, for One is your guide Matthew 23:8-9, so also, And call no man father upon earth. But the one and one is spoken not of the Father only, but of Himself also. For had He spoken excluding Himself, how says He, That ye may become the children of the light? And again, if He called the Father only, Master, how says He, For so I am; and again, For one is your Guide, even Christ? John 12:26

John 13:14-15

If I then, He says, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

And yet it is not the same thing, for He is Lord and Master, but you are fellow-servants one of another. What means then the as? With the same zeal. For on this account He takes instances from greater actions that we may, if so be, perform the less. Thus schoolmasters write the letters for children very beautifully, that they may come to imitate them though but in an inferior manner. Where now are they who spit on their fellow-servants? Where now they who demand honors? Christ washed the feet of the traitor, the sacrilegious, the thief, and that close to the time of the betrayal, and incurable as he was, made him a partaker of His table; and are you highminded, and do you draw up your eyebrows? Let us then wash one another's feet, says some one, then we must wash those of our domestics. And what great thing if we do wash even those of our domestics? In our case slave and free is a difference of words; but there an actual reality. For by nature He was Lord and we servants, yet even this He refused not at this time to do. But now it is matter for contentment if we do not treat free men as bondmen, as slaves bought with money. And what shall we say in that day, if after receiving proofs of such forbearance, we ourselves do not imitate them at all, but take the contrary part, being in diametrical opposition, lifted up, and not discharging the debt? For God has made us debtors one to another, having first so done Himself, and has made us debtors of a less amount. For He was our Lord, but we do it, if we do it at all, to our fellow-servants, a thing which He Himself implied by saying, If I then your Lord and Master -- so also do ye. It would indeed naturally have followed to say, How much more should ye servants, but He left this to the conscience of the hearers.

2. But why has He done this now? They were for the future to enjoy, some greater, some less honor. In order then that they may not exalt themselves one above the other, and say as they did before, Who is the greatest Matthew 18:1, nor be angry one against the other, He takes down the high thoughts of them all, by saying, that although you may be very great, you ought to have no high thoughts towards your brother. And He mentioned not the greater action, that if I have washed the feet of the traitor, what great matter if you one another's? but having exemplified this by deeds, He then left it to the judgment of the spectators. Therefore He said, Whosoever shall do and teach, the same shall be called great Matthew 5:19; for this is to teach a thing, actually to do it. What pride should not this remove? What kind of folly and insolence should it not annihilate! He who sits upon the Cherubim washed the feet of the traitor, and do you, O man, you that are earth and ashes and cinders and dust, do you exalt yourself, and are you highminded? And how great a hell would you not deserve? If then you desire a high state of mind, come, I will show you the way to it; for thou dost not even know what it is. The man then who gives heed to the present things as being great, is of a mean soul; so that there can neither be humility without greatness of soul, nor conceit except from littleness of soul. For as little children are eager for trifles, gaping upon balls and hoops and dice, but cannot even form an idea of important matters; so in this case, one who is truly wise, will deem present things as nothing, (so that he will neither choose to acquire them himself, nor to receive them from

others;) but he who is not of such a character will be affected in a contrary way, intent upon cobwebs and shadows and dreams of things less substantial than these.

John 13:16-18

Verily I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. I speak not of you all -- but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.

What He said before, this He says here also, to shame them; For if the servant is not greater than his master, nor he that is sent greater than him that sent him, and these things have been done by Me, much more ought they to be done by you. Then, lest any one should say, Why now do You say these things? Do we not already know them? He adds this very thing, I speak not to you as not knowing, but that by your actions ye may show forth the things spoken of. For to know, belongs to all; but to do, not to all. On this account He said, Blessed are you if you do them; and on this account I continually and ever say the same to you, although ye know it, that I may set you on the work. Since even Jews know, but yet they are not blessed; for they do not what they know.

I speak not, He says, of you all. O what forbearance! Not yet does He convict the traitor, but veils the matter, hence giving him room for repentance. He convicts and yet does not convict him when He says thus, He that eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me. It seems to me that the, The servant is not greater than his lord, was uttered for this purpose also, that if any persons should at any time suffer harm either from domestics or from any of the meaner sort, they should not be offended; looking to the instance of Judas, who having enjoyed ten thousand good things, repaid his Benefactor with the contrary. On this account He added, He that eats bread with Me, and letting pass all the rest, He has put that which was most fitted to restrain and shame him; he who was fed by Me, He says, and who shared My table. And He spoke the words, to instruct them to benefit those who did evil to them, even though such persons should continue incurable.

But having said, I speak not of you all, in order not to attach fear to more than one, He at last separates the traitor, speaking thus; He that eats bread with Me. For the, not of you all, does not direct the words to any single one, therefore He added, He that eats bread with Me; showing to that wretched one that He was not seized in ignorance, but even with full knowledge; a thing which of itself was most of all fitted to restrain him. And He said not, betrays Me, but, has lifted up his heel against Me, desiring to represent the deceit, the treachery, the secrecy of the plot.

3. These things are written that we bear not malice towards those who injure us; but rebuke them and weep for them; for the fit subjects of weeping are not they who suffer, but they who do the wrong. The grasping man, the false accuser, and whoever works any other evil thing, do themselves the greatest injury, and us the greatest good, if we do not avenge ourselves. Such a case as this: some one has robbed you; have you given thanks for the injury, and glorified God? By that thanksgiving you have gained ten thousand rewards, just as he has gathered for himself fire unspeakable. But if any one say, How then, if I 'could' not defend myself against him who wronged me, being weaker? I would say this, that you could have put into action the being discontented, the being impatient, (for these things are in our power,) the praying against him, who grieved you, the uttering ten thousand curses against him, the speaking ill of him to every one. He therefore who has not done these things shall even be rewarded for not defending himself, since it is clear that even if he had had the power, he would not have done it. The injured man

uses any weapon that comes to hand, when, being little of soul, he defends himself against one who has injured him, by curses, by abuse, by plotting. Do thou then not only not do these things, but even pray for him; for if you do them not, but will even pray for him, you have become like God. For, pray, it says, for them, that despitefully use you -- that you may be like your Father which is in Heaven. Matthew 5:44-45 Do you see how we are the greatest gainers from the insolence of others? Nothing so delights God, as the not returning evil for evil? But what say I? Not returning evil for evil? Surely we are enjoined to return the opposite, benefits, prayers. Wherefore Christ also repaid him who was about to betray Him with everything opposite. He washed his feet, convicted him secretly, rebuked him sparingly, tended him, allowed him to share His table and His kiss, and not even by these was he made better; nevertheless (Christ) continued doing His own part.

But come, let us teach you even from the example of servants, and (to make the lesson stronger) those in the Old (Testament), that you may know that we have no ground of defense when we remember a wrong. Will you then that I tell you of Moses, or shall we go yet farther back? For the more ancient the instances that can be pointed out, the more are we surpassed. Why so? Because virtue was then more difficult. Those men had no written precepts, no patterns of living, but their nature fought, unarmed, by itself, and was forced to float in all directions unballasted.

Wherefore also when praising Noah, God called him not simply perfect, but added, in his generation Genesis 7:1; signifying, at that time, when there were many hindrances, since many others shone after him, yet will he have nothing less than they; for in his own time he was perfect. Who then before Moses was patient? The blessed and noble Joseph, who having shone by his chastity, shone no less by his long suffering. He was sold when he had done no wrong, but was waiting on others, and serving, and performing all the duties of domestics.

They brought against him an evil accusation, and he did not defend himself, though he had his father on his side. Nay, he even went to carry food to them in the desert, and when he found them not, he did not despair or turn back, (yet he had an excuse for doing so had he chosen,) but remained near the wild beasts and those savage men, preserving the feeling of a true brother. Again, when he dwelt in the prison house, and was asked the cause, he spoke no evil of them, but only, I have done nothing, and, I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and after this again, when he was made lord, he nourished them, and delivered them from ten thousand dangers.

If we be sober, the wickedness of our neighbor is not strong enough to cast us out of our own virtue. But those others were not like him; they both stripped him, and endeavored to kill him, and reproach him with his dream, though they had even received their meat from him, and planned to deprive him of life and of liberty. And they ate, and cared not for their brother lying naked in the pit. What could be worse than such brutality? Were they not worse than any number of murderers?

And after this, having drawn him up, they gave him over to ten thousand deaths, selling him to barbarian and savage men, who were on their journey to barbarians. Yet he, when he became ruler, not only remitted them their punishment, but even acquitted them, as far at least as relating to himself, of their sin, calling what had been done a dispensation of God, not any wickedness of theirs; and the things which he did against them he did not as remembering evil, but in all these he dissembled, for his brother's sake.

After this, when he saw them clinging to him, he straightway threw away the mask, and wept aloud, and embraced them, as though he had received the greatest benefits, he, who formerly was made away with

by them, and he brought them all down into Egypt, and repaid them with ten thousand benefits. What excuse then shall we have, if after the Law, and after grace, and after the addition of so much heavenly wisdom, we do not even strive to rival him who lived before grace and before the Law?

Who shall deliver us from punishment? For there is nothing, there is nothing more grievous than the remembrance of injuries. And this the man has showed that owed ten thousand talents; from whom payment was at one time not demanded, at another time again demanded; not demanded, because of the lovingkindness of God; but demanded, because of his own wickedness, and because of his malice toward his fellow-servant. Knowing all which things, let us forgive our neighbors their trespasses, and repay them by deeds of an opposite kind, that we too may obtain mercy from God, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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