

John 13:1-2

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom's sermon emphasizes Christ's humility and the call for believers to serve others with love and kindness.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:17-18, John 13:2-5, John 13:7-8, John 13:10

Topics: "Humility And Love", "Caring For Widows"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on Jesus' act of washing His disciples' feet, emphasizing the humility and love displayed by Jesus towards His disciples, even towards the traitor Judas. Chrysostom highlights the importance of learning humblemindedness and doing good deeds, drawing attention to the care and protection God provides for widows and orphans. He encourages believers to show kindness and support to widows, promising great rewards and blessings for those who help the vulnerable in society.

Transcript

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.

1. Be imitators of me, said Paul, as I also am of Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1 For on this account He took also flesh of our substance, that by means of it He might teach us virtue. For (God sending His own Son) in the likeness of sinful flesh, it says, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh. Romans 8:3 And Christ Himself says, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Matthew 11:29 And this He taught, not by words alone, but by actions also. For they called Him a Samaritan, and one that had a devil, and a deceiver, and cast stones at Him; and at one time the Pharisees sent servants to take Him, at another they sent plotters against Him; and they continued also insulting Him themselves, and that when they had no fault to find, but were even being continually benefited. Still after such conduct He ceases not to do well to them both by words and deeds. And, when a certain domestic smote Him on the face, He said, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, but if well, why do you smite Me? John 18:23 But this was to those who hated and plotted against Him. Let us see also what He does now towards the disciples, or rather what actions He now exhibits towards the traitor. The man whom most of all there was reason to hate, because being a disciple, having shared the table and the salt, having seen the miracles and been deemed worthy of such great things, he acted more grievously than any, not stoning indeed, nor insulting Him, but betraying and giving Him up, observe in how friendly sort He receives this man, washing his feet; for even in this way He desired to restrain him from that wickedness. Yet it was in His power, had He willed it, to have withered

him like the fig-tree, to have cut him in two as He rent the rocks, to have cleft him asunder like the veil; but He would not lead him away from his design by compulsion, but by choice. Wherefore He washed his feet; and not even by this was that wretched and miserable man shamed.

Before the feast of the Passover, it says, Jesus knowing that His hour had come. Not then knowing, but (it means) that He did what He did having known long ago. That He should depart. Magnificently the Evangelist calls His death, departure. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end. Do you see how when about to leave them He shows greater love? For the, having loved, He loved them unto the end, shows that he omitted nothing of the things which it was likely that one who earnestly loved would do. Why, then did He not this from the beginning? He works the greatest things last, so as to render more intense their attachment, and to lay up for them beforehand much comfort, against the terrible things that were about to fall on them. St. John calls them His own, in respect of personal attachment, since he calls others also His own, in respect of the work of creation; as when he says, His own received Him not. John 1:11 But what means, which were in the world? Because the dead also were His own, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the men of that sort, but they were not in the world. Do you see that He is the God both of the Old and New (Testament)? But what means, He loved them unto the end? It stands for, He continued loving them unceasingly, and this the Evangelist mentions as a sure proof of great affection. Elsewhere indeed He spoke of another (proof), the laying down life for His friends; but that had not yet come to pass. And wherefore did He this thing now? Because it was far more wonderful at a time when He appeared more glorious in the sight of all men. Besides, He left them no small consolation now that He was about to depart, for since they were going to be greatly grieved, He by these means introduces also comfort to the grief.

John 13:2

And supper being ended, the devil having now put it into the heart of Judas to betray Him.

This the Evangelist has said amazed, showing that Jesus washed the man who had already chosen to betray Him. This also proves his great wickedness, that not even the having shared the salt restrained him, (a thing which is most able to restrain wickedness;) not the fact that even up to the last day, his Master continued to bear with him.

John 13:3

Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God, and went to God.

Here the Evangelist says, even wondering, that one so great, so very great, who came from God and went to Him, who rules over all, did this thing, and disdained not even so to undertake such an action. And by the giving over, methinks St. John means the salvation of the faithful. For when He says, All things are given over to Me of My Father Matthew 11:27, He speaks of this kind of giving over; as also in another place He says, Yours they were, and You gave them Me John 17:6; and again, No man can come unto Me except the Father draw him John 6:44; and, Except it be given him from heaven. John 3:27 The Evangelist then either means this, or that Christ would be nothing lessened by this action, since He came from God, and went to God, and possessed all things. But when you hear of giving over, understand it in no human sense, for it shows how He honors the Father, and His unanimity with Him. For as the Father gives over to Him, so He to the Father. And this Paul declares, saying, When He shall have given over the kingdom to God, even the Father. 1 Corinthians 15:24 But St. John has said it here in a more human sense, showing

His great care for them, and declaring His unutterable love, that He now cared for them as for His own; teaching them the mother of all good, even humblemindedness, which He said was both the beginning and the end of virtue. And not without a reason is added the, He came from God and went to God: but that we may learn that He did what was worthy of One who came thence and went there, trampling down all pride.

John 13:4

And having risen from supper, and laid aside His garments.

2. Observe how not by the washing only, but in another way also He exhibits humility. For it was not before reclining, but after they had all sat down, then He arose. In the next place, He does not merely wash them, but does so, putting off His garments. And He did not even stop here, but girded Himself with a towel. Nor was He satisfied with this, but Himself filled (the basin), and did not bid another fill it; He did all these things Himself, showing by all that we must do such things, when we are engaged in well doing, not merely for form's sake, but with all zeal. Now He seems to me to have washed the feet of the traitor first from its saying,

John 13:5

He began to wash the disciples' feet, and adding,

John 13:6

Then comes He to Simon Peter and Peter says unto Him, Lord, do You wash my feet?

With those hands, he says, with which You have opened eyes, and cleansed lepers, and raised the dead? For this (question) is very emphatic; wherefore He needed not to have said any more than the, Thou; for even of itself this would have sufficed to convey the whole. Some one might reasonably enquire, how none of the others forbade Him, but Peter only, which was a mark of no slight love and reverence. What then is the cause? He seems to me to have washed the traitor first, then to have come to Peter, and that the others were afterwards instructed from his case. That He washed some one other before him is clear from its saying, But when He came to Peter. Yet the Evangelist is not a vehement accuser, for the began, is the expression of one implying this. And even if Peter were the first, yet it is probable that the traitor, being a forward person, had reclined even before the chief. For by another circumstance also his forwardness is shown, when He dips with his Master in the dish, and being convicted, feels no compunction; while Peter being rebuked but once on a former occasion, and for words which he spoke from loving affection, was so abashed, that being even distressed and trembling, he begged another to ask a question. But Judas, though continually convicted, felt not. John 13:24 When therefore He came to Peter, he says unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?

John 13:7

He says unto him, What I do you know not now, but you shall know here after.

That is you shall know how great is the gain from this, the profit of the lesson, and how it is able to guide us into all humblemindedness. What then does Peter? He still hinders Him, and says,

John 13:8

You shall never wash my feet. What doest thou, Peter? Rememberest thou not those former words? Did you not say, 'Be merciful to Yourself,' and heardest thou not in return, 'Get behind Me, Satan'? Matthew 16:22 Are you not even so sobered, but are you yet vehement? Yea, he says, for what is being done is a great matter, and full of amazement. Since then he did this from exceeding love, Christ in turn subdues him by the same; and as there He effected this by sharply rebuking him, and saying, You are an offense unto Me, so here also by saying,

If I wash you not, you have no part with Me. What then says that hot and burning one?

John 13:9

Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

Vehement in deprecation, he becomes yet more vehement in acquiescence; but both from love. For why said He not wherefore He did this, instead of adding a threat? Because Peter would not have been persuaded. For had He said, Suffer it, for by this I persuade you to be humbleminded, Peter would have promised it ten thousand times, in order that his Master might not do this thing. But now what says He? He speaks of that which Peter most feared and dreaded, the being separated from Him; for it is he who continually asks, Where are You going? John 13:36 Wherefore also he said, I will give even my life for You. John 13:37 And if, after hearing, What I do you know not now, but you shall know hereafter, he still persisted, much more would he have done so had he learned (the meaning of the action). Therefore said He, but you shall know hereafter, as being aware, that should he learn it immediately he would still resist. And Peter said not, Tell me, that I may suffer You, but (which was much more vehement) he did not even endure to learn, but withstands Him, saying, You shall never wash my feet. But as soon as He threatened, he straightway relaxed his tone. But what means, You shall know after this? After this? When? When in My Name you shall have cast out devils; when you shall have seen Me taken up into Heaven, when you shall have learned from the Spirit that I sit on His right hand, then shall you understand what is being done now. What then says Christ? When Peter said, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head, He replies,

John 13:10-11

He that is washed, needs not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and you are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him.

And if they are clean, why washes He class="greek">washest thou. "}"--> their feet? That we may learn to be modest. On which account He came not to any other part of the body, but to that which is considered more dishonorable than the rest. But what is, He that is washed? It is instead of, he that is clean. Were they then clean, who had not yet been delivered from their sins, nor deemed worthy of the Spirit, since sin still had the mastery, the handwriting of the curse still remaining, the victim not having yet been offered? How then calls He them clean? That you may not deem them clean, as delivered from their sins, He adds, Behold, you are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you. That is, In this way you are so far clean; you have received the light, you have been freed from Jewish error. For the Prophet also says, 'Wash you, make you clean, put away the wickedness from your souls' Isaiah 1:16, Septuagint; so that such a one is washed and is clean. Since then these men had cast away all wickedness from their souls, and had companied with Him with a pure mind, therefore He says according to the word of the Prophet, he that is washed is clean already. For in that place also It means not the washing of water, practiced by the Jews; but the cleansing of the conscience.

3. Be we then also clean; learn we to do well. But what is well? Judge for the fatherless, plead for the widow; and come, let us reason together, says the Lord. Isaiah 1:7 There is frequent mention in the Scriptures of widows and orphans, but we make no account of this. Yet consider how great is the reward. Though, it says, your sins be as scarlet, I will whiten them as snow; though they be red like crimson, I will whiten them as wool. For a widow is an unprotected being, therefore He takes much care for her. For they, when it is even in their power to contract a second marriage, endure the hardships of widowhood through fear of God. Let us then all, both men and women, stretch forth our hands to them, that we may never undergo the sorrows of widow-hood; or if we should have to undergo them, let us lay up a great store of kindness for ourselves. Not small is the power of the widow's tears, it is able to open heaven itself. Let us not then trample on them, nor make their calamity worse, but assist them by every means. If so we do, we shall put around ourselves much safety, both in the present life, and in that which is to come. For not here alone, but there also will they be our defenders, cutting away most of our sins by reason of our beneficence towards them, and causing us to stand boldly before the judgment-seat of Christ. Which may it come to pass that we all obtain, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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