

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN13C_The Lord's Farewell to His Disciples)

John 13:31-38

Introduction

After Judas departed into the night, Jesus was free to express His innermost thoughts with the other remaining disciples. The washing of the disciples' feet had caused them to be very attentive and responsive to His every word. Imagine their feelings as they listened to Jesus describe His departure. Jesus encouraged them to be patient as He explained the fact that He would return (14:1-4).

The next several chapters and verses (13:31-17:26) are primarily focused upon our Lord's farewell address to His disciples. The first stage of the farewell address (13:31-14:31) revolves around Jesus' instruction to His disciples which is interrupted on four occasions by questions from different disciples: Peter (13:36); Thomas (14:5); Philip (14:8); and Judas – not the betrayer (14:22). After replying to each question, Jesus reverts to His original trend of thought. There is a brief interlude in the conversation/instruction at the end of John 14 as Jesus and His disciples leave the place where they had supper together.

The second stage of this conversation/instruction is found in chapters 15-16 and the setting is a different location. The focus of our Lord's message to the disciples in this section is upon the disciples' union with Him and additional instruction regarding the coming Holy Spirit. At the end of this section, Jesus prays to the heavenly Father for His disciples (chapter 17).

The Farewell Command (13:31-35)

Judas' departure set the stage for Jesus to teach the remaining disciples principles that contrasted worldly approbation and power lust with spiritual humility. Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet contrasted sharply with the personal approbation that motivated the disciples as they had argued in the not too distant past about who should be the greatest (Lu 22:24). That humble act also contrasted sharply with Judas' hopes for worldly glory and riches through a political Messiah/King. Jesus' coming death on a Cross would be the hour of His glorification as well as His greatest act of humility.

In verse 31, Jesus says – “Now is the Son of Man glorified.” The title “Son of Man” was only used by Jesus of Himself and was never used by the disciples of Jesus. (Stephen used the title of Jesus in Acts 7:56. The title “Son of Man” is a reference to Jesus' humanity – a humanity that was perfect in the fullest sense that God originally intended. As human, Jesus lived His life in total subjection to the Father's will – even to the point of death (Phil 2:8-9). This perfect “Son of Man” did not sin like Adam. Jesus, the “Son of Man” who remained humble to the point of death was glorified through His resurrection and ascension from death.

Not only was Jesus glorified in His death, but God the Father was glorified too. Through the death of Jesus as an acceptable payment for the penalty of sin, the strategic victory of the Angelic Conflict was accomplished. The mechanism for God's vindication was established. The glorified “Son of Man” Who is also the Son of God would be reunited with the heavenly Father, only now in a resurrected human body. This is probably the greatest mystery of the universe from our vantage point – i.e. how God could be both human and deity at the same time while here on this earth during His incarnation. The phenomenal doctrine of the hypostatic union only goes so far in explaining this spiritual phenomenon. We will never be able to fully comprehend the hypostatic union in all its reality until eternity and it is a good illustration of one of the truths to which Paul referred when he said...

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1 Co 13:12).

In verse 33, Jesus uses the phrase “little children” to address His disciples. This is the only time the phrase is used in John’s Gospel; therefore, it is significant. (John uses this phrase six times in his first epistle). By using the phrase, Jesus is endearing Himself to His disciples to prepare them for the coming period of despair, bewilderment, and disillusion as they endure a separation from Him after His death.

Jesus gave His disciples the command that they should love each other and show each other love in the same way that He had shown them while He lived with them. They should model their behavior after Him and by so doing, all would know that they were His disciples. The disciples were privileged to have seen and observed the human Jesus as well as experience the wonder of His miracles and teaching. Today, we grow closer to the Lord through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives and through knowledge of His Word – Scripture.

Peter did not realize his own weakness yet as he declared that he would lay down his life for Jesus. Peter was in fact a man of action as evidenced by his cutting off the guard’s ear (Mt 26:51; Mk 14:47; Lu 22:49-50 cf. Jn 18:10). At this point in John 13, Peter was boasting in self-confidence. However, the Lord’s words must have been rather sobering to Peter and when Peter did in fact deny that he knew Jesus, he must have been crushed. Peter’s confidence was in his own devotion and courage, i.e. his abilities and strength. This confidence in his own abilities was Peter’s greatest weakness. The battle in which we are engaged is a spiritual battle and the confidence needed to fight the battle is derived from spiritual assets available to us – prayer, the application of God’s word to the situation, etc.

Principle: God allows us to be crushed on occasion in order to enforce humility and bring about grace orientation in our lives. In other words, God knows that nothing gets our attention like open failure and convinces us that we possess a false paradigm consisting of stubborn self-confidence and self-will.

Application: Have you been crushed by the realization of your own spiritual inadequacy apart from God’s gracious provision?

Application: Have you set aside all desires for approval from others as you exercise your spiritual gift? In other words, are you motivated by status and man’s approval or are you solely motivated by your love for the Lord and hearing the Lord say – “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Someone might ask about the real difference between Peter and Judas. After all, they both failed Jesus. The difference ultimately rests in their choice; however, in one case the choice was an aberration – a decision made during a momentary breakdown in courage. In the other case, the betrayal was cold and premeditated. We have seen Jesus’ lengthy attempts to reach Judas in which Judas was given the chance to repent. Judas chose to walk out the door. Peter acknowledged his mistakes and failure to the Lord and the Lord used Peter mightily in the Jerusalem church and in writing a couple of important epistles. No doubt, many judged Peter for his failure, but the Lord still had a plan for him because the Lord knew his heart.

A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench. (Mt 12:20)

Principle: The believer should never let a past failure(s) determine the course of the remainder of the believer’s life.

Application: Is there a past failure that you are allowing to be a spiritual ball and chain?