

What Love Requires

John 13:1-17

God is love. And when he sent his Son into the world he revealed what love really is. Do you see the connection between the coming death of the Lord on the cross and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ toward his disciples? It was when he knew that his hour had come (the hour of his death for sinners) that he who had loved them, in the world, persevered in that love. He would love them to the end, and in fact beyond. And it is in the cross that the love of the Lord is most fully revealed.

John, in his first general epistle, says this, "By this we know love: that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." (1 John 3:16) He goes on to make clear that this is not merely emoting from warmth of heart. It means self sacrifice from sincerity of heart.

It helps us to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is King of all kings. His power is limitless. He can do all his most holy will.

What would you do with absolute power? The Lord used it to perform a menial task for the benefit of his disciples. We are told that the Lord knew that his divine mission was to be fulfilled. He would destroy the devil and all his works. He would save a people for the eternal glory of God. And, armed with that knowledge he arose from the table, girded himself in the fashion of a lowly servant, and began to wash his own disciples feet.

The Lord did not immediately banish all trouble from the earth. The Lord did not bring sickness and death to an end. I suppose that is what many of us would have done, but the Lord has a different timetable from ours. These things will come to us one day. No, he simply rose and began to wash his own disciple's feet.

This was an activity that was reserved for the lowliest of servants. Human beings in their finite wisdom often resist the will and purpose of God and sometimes even the clear teaching of scripture, thinking that they are on the side of truth. Peter protested, "You shall never wash my feet!" The Lord reminded him of his need for grace by telling him that in order to share in the benefits of the Savior he must be washed.

Peter was quick to relent. We must be washed by the blood of the Lamb and we need a continual ministry of cleansing from the Lord. The ancient guest arrived clean for the most part, but in need of the refreshment of foot washing. The dusty roads would have made that a certainty. So it is with us. We are clean by the blood of Christ, but we have an ongoing need for daily cleansing, until that time when we stand in the presence of the Lord, and are made white as snow for all eternity.

Having washed their feet the Lord posed a question. "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (13:12b) He reminded them that he was their teacher and in fact their lord, that is their king. On one occasion his childish disciples had been found arguing about whom among them was the greatest. Not long after that, James and John, the sons of Zebedee came to the Lord with a very worldly request, a petition

worthy of the politicians of this world. They asked for places of honor at his right and left sides.

The Lord responded that his kingdom was not to be like the kingdoms of the earth. In this world the exercise of power is just that. Men and women are expected to bow to the will of others who have managed to acquire momentary and fleeting authority.

No, to be great in the kingdom of God is to become a servant. It is to seek the good of others, even at great expense to one's self. It is to see others as better than ourselves. It is to humble oneself before others in an effort to serve them, particularly at the greatest point of their need. It is first and foremost to seek their salvation.

And why should this be so? Because the first place in the kingdom belongs to someone who has enslaved himself to thousands upon thousands who are undeserving. That place is held by the Savior who died on the cross. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has loved with a perfect love. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has humbled himself before undeserving sinners and has become sin for us; as he said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

by Joe Nesom