

† The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

The Splendid Christ

John 13:1-4

13:1 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. 2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 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, 4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

One of the great questions that was asked in one form or another concerning Jesus Christ was, “Who is this?” With every miracle, with every message, crowds and individuals alike asked, “Who is this?” Who is Jesus? What is He like? What does He want from all who hear His message and examine His life? There are many things to be said in answer to such questions, but first and foremost, such questions must be answered by looking and the splendor of Christ. As the song we often sing so wonderfully declares:

*No mortal can with Him compare, among the sons of men,
Fairer is He than all the fair, that the heavenly train.*

S. Stennett

Truly, truly, Jesus is incomparable. Even as God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, **“To whom would you liken Me and make Me equal and compare Me, That we would be alike?” (Isaiah 46:5).** Truly, truly Jesus is remarkable in both His person and His work; perfect deity, faultless humanity, impeccable love, purest humility; truly sovereign over all and yet condescending to serve rebellious, hateful ungrateful sinners. In all these we see the splendor of Jesus. As another song has noted:

*I have seen the face of Jesus, tell me not of aught beside,
I have heard the voice of Jesus, all my soul is satisfied.
All around is earthly splendor, earthly scenes lie fair and bright.
But mine eyes no longer see them, for the glory of that Light.
Light that knows no cloud, no waning, Light wherein I see His face,
All His love’s uncounted treasures, all the riches of His grace*

G. Tersteengen

Most of you are well aware that we have recently finished a three year study of the letter to the Hebrews. In that letter, our concern was to note the superiority of Jesus Christ – to see how much better is Christ than angels, religious systems and any other people. As we come now to the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17, we begin in the first four verses of John 13 with an explanation, a setting of the scene that is to come, a prelude of sorts - that points out to us not specifically the superiority of Christ, but rather what I would refer to as the splendor or splendidness of Christ.

Now – what do I mean by splendidness? Splendidness is the noun form of the adjective splendid - and splendid means – “strikingly admirable or fine; that which is distinguished or

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glorious.” Splendidness then is that which is strikingly admirable or fine or glorious. So then, as we come to the opening description of the events and conversations of the Upper Room, I would like to have you consider what the Apostle says concerning the splendidness of Christ as we find five splendid pictures concerning the person and work of Jesus.

I. Splendid Attention (13:1a)

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...

As we read the opening words of John 13:1, we find ourselves struck with the splendid attention of Jesus Christ. We are given the setting here. The festive week of the feast of Passover and of Unleavened Bread was about to begin. Generally speaking, this would be a time of great rejoicing as Israel celebrated her deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and the freedom she was granted to worship the one true God.

But up against this scene of rejoicing, our Savior was making preparations not simply to eat one last time with His disciples before His betrayal, arrest and finally His crucifixion, but also to inform and instruct His disciples privately about what is to come, what they should expect and how they should conduct themselves.

And before even a word of instruction is given, the Apostle John sees fit to tell us first what was foremost on the heart and mind of our Savior was His attention to the purpose for which He came to the earth. Our text says, “**Jesus knowing [fully aware; without surprise – knew] that His hour [His time to fulfill His purpose] had come...**” What is this hour? Look back at John 12 and note with me verse 27 and this prayer of Jesus:

Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour [to this time].

And just what was the purpose of this hour. Let us drop down and read 12:32-33 where Jesus says,

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

Jesus had come “**to seek and to save that which was lost**” (Luke 19:10); “**not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.**” (Mark 10:45). Beloved, nothing ever distracted Jesus from the task. At the beginning of His ministry the devil sought to thwart Jesus with the temptations in the wilderness. The Pharisees and religious leaders sought to derail Him with their own perceptions and practices of the law – but Jesus revealed His splendid, His glorious attention to His purpose to redeem mankind by dying for their sins.

But there is one more aspect of this splendid attention found in the first part of verse one. Not only did Jesus stay true to the goal, but His hearts desire was also to be back in the glorious splendor of His Father for He was also knowing that “**He would depart out of this world to the Father.**” Jesus had left the glorious presence and position He had with the Father in order to

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save sinful humanity. But Jesus also knew that through His suffering, He would return once again to the blessed presence of His Father.

Beloved, O that we would be possessed with the mind of Christ in this regard. That even as Jesus struggled and suffered against sin for us on the cross, we too might struggle against sin as we await the second coming of our Lord, knowing, as 1 Peter 4:1 tells us, that **“since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”** And then again in 1 Peter 4:13 we read, **“but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice [and keep on rejoicing] with exultation.”**

Our blessed Redeemer was never deterred in His purpose and this makes Him splendid. Let us rejoice and proclaim the splendid attention of Jesus to His mission and realize that we have been called to exercise a similar attention – that we might **“strive [agonize, labor, struggle] to enter through the narrow door”** (Luke 13:24) and find ourselves less and less enamored and enticed by the world.

II. Splendid Affection (13:1b)

...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.

But in addition to this splendid attention of Jesus, we are next informed in verse 1 of the splendid affection of Jesus for **“His own who were in the world.”** We must not forget that according to John 1:11, Jesus originally presented Himself to those who were “His own” by natural birth. Jesus was born a Jew in the Jewish nation of Israel. But as we noted last week, after three and a half years of miracles and teachings to those who were “His own” naturally, these had rejected Him. In John 12:37 says, **“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.”** And in light of this rejection, John tells us that Jesus not only **“went away and hid Himself from them”** according to John 12:36, but also redefines the phrase **“His own”** to speak of those not who were related to Jesus naturally, but rather those who were related to Him spiritually as those who believed in Him. It is those who are spiritually **“His own”** whom He loves and for whom He will lay down His life. We are even told this definition of His own again back in John 1:11-13;

11 He came to His own [naturally], and those who were His own [naturally] did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God [His own – given by the Father], even to those who believe [spiritual relationship] in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man [not naturally born], but of God [born spiritually].

So “His own” are those who believe in His name and what is the splendid affection shown to them? We read at the end of verse 1, **“...He loved them to the end.”** What makes the love of Jesus so splendid is that it is an eternal and enduring love. We might rightly translate this to read, “He loved them all the way through.” What does this mean? O hear of the splendid love of Christ, who loved Peter all the way through his boastings and betrayal, loving him back to humility and victory. And likewise, do you know the splendid love of Christ that takes faithless sinners like you and me by grace and promises to take us through to the end – past the shame of Calvary,

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past the stench of death and decay – to bring us up in His resurrection to see the glory of God’s day. Truly Philippians 1:6 is a reiteration of this truth of the splendid affection of Christ, that we may be confident of this very thing, **“that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** Do you know that you are truly “His own” – loved to the uttermost? Will you sing the song...

Oh, my Savior crucified, near Thy cross would I abide
There to look with steadfast eye, on Thy dying agony.

Jesus bruised and put to shame, tells me all Jehovah’s name;
“God is love,” I surely know, by my Savior’s depths of woe.

In His spotless soul’s distress, I perceive my guiltiness;
Oh how vile my low estate, since my ransom was so great!

Dwelling on Mount Calvary, contrite shall my spirit be;
Rest and holiness shall find, fashioned like my Savior’s mind.

Robert C. Chapman

III. Splendid Attitude (13:2)

During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him...

Not only do we learn of the splendid attention and the splendid affection of Christ, but beginning in verse 2 we see also the splendid attitude of Christ. The Apostle wants his readers to know that the betrayer of Jesus was all set – the hour had come and the means by which Jesus would be handed over to death was in place as Judas would soon leave the company of this fellowship and betray the Savior. And let us not forget that verse two here is in the context of what Jesus already knew. He knew His hour had come; He knew His purpose; He knew His own and He knew what was in the heart of Judas – from the beginning. All the way back in John 6:64 we read,

“But there were some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.”

Also, in the Upper Room Discourse itself, Jesus plainly states that He knows that one of the twelve will betray Him.

John 13:10

Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.”

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John 13:18

I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'HE WHO EATS MY BREAD HAS LIFTED UP HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.'

John 13:26

Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

Why is all this important? Because even with Jesus knowing that He was to be betrayed and knowing full well that the consequences of that betrayal would lead to His horrifying experience of scourging, crucifixion and separation from the Father, the splendid attitude of Jesus to yet love, to yet instruct, to yet lead, to yet guide the disciples was evident.

There is nothing more difficult than being in a room with one whom you know is plotting or has something against you. It can be a distraction. It can lead you into feelings of insecurity, bitterness, resentment and even hate. Yet Jesus is again undistracted in His purpose. He knew that He would be betrayed. He knew that it was a part of the Father's purpose and so He did not let His attitude become bitter, but yet praised God and fulfilled His mission.

And may I point out that this concept of betrayal and therefore of maintaining a right attitude introduced here would become a key teaching for the disciples to remember later on in the Upper Room Discourse. Look with me at John 15:15;

If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

John 15:20

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.'

John 16:2

They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage [have the right attitude and perspective]; I have overcome the world.

Let us remember the splendid attitude of Christ, ***"who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" [maintain the splendid attitude of Christ] (Hebrews 12:2-3).***

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IV. Splendid Authority (13:3)

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...

There is an additional item that the Apostle tells us Jesus knew as found in verse 3. Jesus knew of His splendid authority, **“that the Father had given all things into His hands...”** and that He had divine origins and would soon be with the Father again. Consider the purpose of this statement well. What Judas was doing was no surprise. As Judas would betray Jesus and hand Him over to the Pharisees, scribes and chief priests, Judas was not in charge, nor was He in control. Neither were the religious leaders sovereign over Jesus. No, Jesus is seen here in splendid authority – the sovereign Lord, fully God, fully assured of where He was going; master over all, worthy of worship and praise.

Later, after His resurrection, Jesus would say to the disciples, **“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”** (Matthew 28:18). There is nothing beyond the purview of Jesus. There is nothing that comes to pass apart from His purpose and plan. And not even the son of perdition with His sinister plot can thwart or supersede the sovereignty and splendid authority of Christ. Let us remember the words of Christ from John 10:17-18

17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

The splendid authority of Christ was that He would voluntarily and graciously lay down His life for His own and no one; not Judas, not the religious leaders; not even Satan was pulling Christ's strings or making Him jump through their hoops. Salvation is from the Lord, directed by the decree of God in eternity past. All of this serves to remind us that nothing happens to us as God's children that is not meant for God's glory and our good. To quote those often familiar but important verses to this end, let us remember the evil intent and actions of Joseph's brothers, selling him into slavery. And what was Joseph's response in Genesis 50:20?

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

And likewise, let us remember that no one and nothing has authority over us except the person and plan of God who promises in Romans 8:28,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

May we learn to rest in the splendid authority of Jesus Christ to whom has been given all things.

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V. Splendid Action (13:4)

...got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

This brings us then to verse 4 and our final consideration – the splendid action of Christ. Let me develop the scene here a little bit more. As we come to verse 4, we need to understand that the disciples had already made the preparations for the Passover meal. They are assembled in the upper room and most likely Jesus has already begun the first parts of the traditional Seder or Passover meal and has also introduced the practice of the Lord's supper. At a pause in the meal, we read in Luke 22:24ff that the disciples began to argue with one another as to who would be the greatest among them in the kingdom and who would have the positions of prominence. While this self-exalting, competitive pride-fest was going on, none of the disciples had evidently thought about the fact that there was no slave to perform the customary washing of the feet of the guests. It has been suggested that at other times, the disciples might have very well washed one another's feet, but on this special night, the Passover, none would condescend to do such a menial task. Rather than humbly serve one another, their minds were bent on self and filled with bitter contentions.

Then, according to John 13:4, even in the midst of this senseless quarrel, we are told that Jesus ***“got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel He girded Himself.”*** I cannot help but think the room fell deafly silent as He who was their Master took off the garments that identified Him as rabbi and took the very form of a servant. He of whom we were just told was Sovereign of all reveals Himself now to be the Servant of all. And in a room where no one would admit himself to be inferior to another, were now looking upon the Lord of heaven and earth garbed as a lowly slave, preparing to perform the lowliest, the absolutely most menial of tasks – to wash the dirt, grim and dung off the feet of the disciples.

Did the Apostle Paul have this scene in mind when he wrote in Philippians 2:6-8?

6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Maybe Paul did, maybe he didn't. But Paul did capture the essence of the truth as found in John 13:4 – that Jesus came to show us humble, sacrificial love; a splendid action which He did not fail to perform. And may I say that I do not see Jesus performing this action of which we will look more in depth next week grudgingly. There was no pretense in His action. Jesus was not doing this because He had to, but because He found joy in serving the disciples in this manner. Can you believe it, the Sovereign Savior enjoyed serving this sinful assembly of prideful men? But His joy did not end with washing their feet, but, as we will see, the joy was dying for their sins that they might be made right with God, that they might become the sons of God. For I would have you note that the phrase “laid aside” there in verse four, speaking of His garments, is the same Greek phrase found in John 15:13 where we read,

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

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The laying aside of the earthly garments to humbly wash the disciples dirt and dung covered feet was to be a picture of Jesus laying aside or laying down His life to cleans the pride and sin infested lives of “His own.” What a splendid action! What a marvelous display of His love for “His own.” What a splendid action by which to call those who are His own to humble service. I like how Andrew Murray challenges believers to take on Christ’s splendid action as our own:

“It is only by the indwelling of Christ in His divine humility that we become truly humble. We have our pride from another, from Adam; we must have our humility from Another too. Pride is ours, and rules us with such terrible power, because it is our self, our very nature. Humility must be ours in the same way; it must be in our very self, our very nature. The promise is ‘where,’ even in the heart, ‘sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly.’”

Beloved, the consideration of this splendid action of Christ, along with the splendid attention, affection, attitude, and authority ought to be the continual pursuit of our studies as well as conduct of our lives. May we devote ourselves to the attention of Christ, to manifest the affection of Christ, to possess the attitude of Christ, to live under the authority of Christ that we might perform the action of Christ.

Who is this? Who is Jesus? I hope we have answered that in part this morning and my prayer would be that all might know Him more than simply an historical figure; a good man who did extraordinary things – but that we might all know Him as Savior and Lord, that we would believe the signs He performed and receive the words that He spoke. For the signs reveal Him to be God and the words He spoke are the words of life. Let us truly know the splendor of Christ this day. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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