



International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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John 13:1-11 Commentary New American Standard Bible

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse [*International Bible Study Commentary*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [*International Bible Study Forum*](#).

(John 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.

John did not repeat what the other gospel writers wrote about baptism, the baptism of Jesus, and the Last Supper of Jesus. John revealed a deeper spiritual meaning of baptism and the Last Super in John chapter 13, and elsewhere. To learn about Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist, see Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-15, and Luke 3:21-22. To learn more about Jesus' Last Supper, see Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:22-26, and Luke 22:14-34.

In John 12:27, Jesus spoke about the fact that His hour had come. So, John reminded his readers that before the Passover festival Jesus knew that the end of His public ministry to the crowds and His private ministry to His disciples was at hand. Jesus was not "caught by surprise" at what lay ahead for Him. Jesus knew that when He died on the cross that was not the end of Him. Rather, He knew He would suffer and die, knew He would rise again, and knew He would ascend into heaven and return to be with His Father.

Jesus knew He would depart “this world” where He had been treated so cruelly, and where His followers would also be treated cruelly by those who chose the path of darkness. He also knew that He had loved and would continue to love completely throughout eternity “His own,” the children of light who remained in the world but were not a part of “this world.” Their assurance of Jesus’ continuous love and their experience of Jesus’ never-ending love enabled Jesus’ first disciples and all who have followed Jesus since then to suffer cruelty in Jesus’ Name from those of “this world.” The assurance of Jesus’ continued presence with them through the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, that Jesus will teach about in John chapter 14, enables believers in Jesus to witness for Him with courage and faith as He leads.

(John 13:2) During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him,

In John 12:6, we learned that Judas was a thief who stole from the common purse. Because Judas did not repent and ask Jesus to change his way of life and help him leave the path of darkness and come into the light, Judas went from bad to worse. Remember the man Jesus healed who had been ill for thirty-eight years. In John 5:14, when Jesus saw him later in the temple, He warned him, “Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” Judas knew Jesus’ words and saw His works, so Judas knew about the possibility of going from bad to worse if he continued to disobey God. From continuing to sin, Judas opened his heart to the work and temptations of the devil, and the devil put the betrayal of Jesus for money into Judas’ heart. Notice: Judas was present during the Last Supper, and Jesus also washed Judas’ feet as an act of the deepest humility in loving obedience to His Father and love for His disciples, but Jesus washing Judas’ feet had no spiritual effect on the one committed to betraying Jesus.

(John 13:3) 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,

Jesus did not engage in this remarkable act of love, grace, and humility to earn acceptance from His Father or to gain privileges and powers that He did not already possess. Jesus knew “all things;” indeed all creation and all

that existed, had been given to Him before He washed His disciples' feet or died on the cross. In Matthew 28:18, prior to His ascension into heaven, we read, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'" "All authority" belonged to Jesus and was given to Him by the Father from the beginning, as "the Word" from eternity past, for we read in John 1:3-4, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." Having come from God, Jesus did not minister as He did to earn the right to go to God. Everything Jesus did, He did as an act of pure, unselfish, self-giving love for His own, for His "children of light." Jesus' acts of redeeming love show what He will do for all who will believe in Him as recorded in the Bible. Jesus' suffering and death reveal the most remarkable acts of grace, humility, and love that the Son of God, the Lord and Savior of the world, could perform. Jesus suffered and died for sinners and rebels who by grace through faith in Him would receive eternal life from Him and enter the Kingdom of God because of His sacrificial death and resurrection.

(John 13:4) *got up from supper, and *laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.

Before a supper or an important feast, those attending would usually bathe. Since Jews walked in sandals or on bare feet, their feet would naturally get dirty. At the table where they ate, they would recline near enough to others so they could easily pass food to one another (for example, Jesus passed food to Judas). So, they washed their feet at the door, or the host provided a slave to wash the feet of his guests, or he washed their feet himself.

Remember John 12:1-8, out of love for Jesus and with the deepest humility, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a perfumed ointment and dried them with her hair. Out of love and with the deepest humility, Jesus took off His outer garment and took the place of the lowest slave to wash His disciples' feet.

It seems that before supper none of His disciples had washed their own feet or the feet of the others, so they were eating with unclean feet during supper—something Jesus noticed. In Luke 22:24-28, we learn why they may have been eating with unclean feet. During supper, they had been arguing about which of them was the greatest, and in that context, none of

them would wash the feet of anyone else. Each one thought he was better than the others. So, Jesus told them, “I am among you as one who serves.” Notice: Jesus got up from the table and interrupted His eating and teaching to demonstrate some lessons His disciples needed. He prepared himself to wash their feet—something none of them were prepared to do, offered to do, or wanted to do. Thinking themselves important as Jesus’ disciples, they never thought of doing such a menial and degrading task. So, Jesus got up and prepared himself to serve them as the lowest slave in a household.

(John 13:5) Then He *poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

Beyond the actual physical description and washing of His disciples’ feet, Jesus intended to make a spiritual application and teach by example, as we have seen Him do previously in the Gospel of John and the other gospels.

(John 13:6) So He *came to Simon Peter. He *said to Him, “Lord, do You wash my feet?”

We do not know if Simon Peter was the first disciple to have his feet washed by Jesus, but when Jesus came to Peter, Peter spoke with astonishment and expressed his intention that Jesus would not wash his feet. Because Peter honored Jesus as his Lord and Master, he did not want Jesus to humble himself and wash his feet—the feet of a sinner.

(John 13:7) Jesus answered and said to him, “What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter.”

In answer to Peter, Jesus made a universal statement that would apply to everything He had said and done in the past and would do in the future. This truth also applies to those who read and study the Bible. Many times, students of the Bible have not been able to understand what they have read until later. We will not understand some truths in the Bible until we learn other or additional truths. Jesus’ disciples would not understand some of what Jesus did and taught until after He died, rose from the dead, and gave them the Holy Spirit to help them. Today, believers in Jesus Christ will not

understand some truths in the Bible until the Holy Spirit who indwells them gives them the light of understanding. We will not understand some truths completely until we choose to believe them without needing to be given a full measure of understanding. We must wait for further understanding as we trust that God will teach us what we need to know when the time is right. Other truths will not be understood until believers obey or practice the truths they already know from their study of the Bible. Believing the Bible is true and obeying Jesus according to the truths we already know are essential to learning and understanding more truths.

(John 13:8) Peter *said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

Knowing Jesus was too good to wash his feet because he was a sinner, Peter objected and told Jesus that he would never let Him wash his feet. Jesus replied that if He did not wash Peter, if Peter would not obey Him and let Him wash his feet, then Peter could not have any relationship with Him. Peter's refusal to obey Jesus would have meant the end of his discipleship and friendship with Jesus and the other disciples.

We can begin to understand Jesus' teaching about baptism in the Gospel of John with Jesus' words, "Unless I wash you." Believers in Jesus choose to obey Jesus' command and receive baptism. When being baptized, they show they have totally committed themselves to obeying Jesus in all things and they have set themselves apart from this world to follow Jesus. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, baptism serves as a sign or symbol that Jesus has cleansed those who believe in Him from all unrighteousness, and He has set them apart as one of His own, as children of light. Baptism does not cleanse believers; baptism shows that believers in Jesus have accepted what Jesus has done for them. John taught more about how the believer is cleansed from sin in 1 John 1:5-10, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we

deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”

(John 13:9) Simon Peter *said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.”

Not yet fully understanding, Peter understood in spirit what Jesus meant, so Peter declared that he wanted to share everything with Jesus. He wanted to remain a disciple of Jesus, a servant of Jesus, and a friend of Jesus. He wanted Jesus to clean his feet so he could follow Jesus wherever Jesus led. He wanted Jesus to clean his hands so he could do whatever Jesus wanted. He wanted Jesus to clean his head so all his thoughts would be pure and all his choices would be according to the will of Jesus.

(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.”

Jesus replied that Peter had bathed or had been baptized. Peter had submitted to baptism, even as all of John’s and Jesus’ followers had repented of their sins and had submitted to baptism. Peter understood Jesus, for later, on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:38-39, Peter told those who believed the good news about Jesus Christ: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” Peter did not need to be baptized or washed again. Having been baptized in accordance with the command of Jesus, Peter would soon be cleansed of all sin as Jesus intended after Jesus shed His blood and died on the cross. Looking forward to His death on the cross and its significance for all His true followers, by His word Jesus cleansed Peter and told Peter that He was clean. Before Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood for His disciples, Jesus told them in John 15:3, “You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.”

Peter only needed his feet cleansed, for the shed blood of Jesus cleansed him completely and would also keep his feet clean. As believers in Jesus walk in this world, their feet get dirty; that is, they still commit sins from day to day. Believers in Jesus are not yet perfect in thought, word, and deed. When believers sin, they need to go to Jesus, repent of their sins, ask Jesus to cleanse them from their sins, and accept Jesus' total cleansing of their sins because He shed His blood and died and rose again for them. Each day believers need to accept Jesus' offer to cleanse them from their sins of that day and humbly ask Jesus to help them keep clean. Each time we sin, Jesus humbles himself again and again when He cleanses us from all sin—for Jesus loves us, “His own,” and Jesus will love us completely throughout eternity. Receiving baptism is a public sign of true faith in Jesus; it is not a once and for all cleansing from sin. Only the shed blood and sacrificial death of Jesus (not baptismal water) can cleanse anyone from all sin. Judas had been baptized, but he was not cleansed from sin. Judas never believed in Jesus as his Lord and Savior and Judas never turned from practicing sin. Judas would not allow himself to be cleansed by the words of Jesus nor would he obey the words of Jesus that he heard spoken to him, the other disciples, and the crowds when Jesus preached. Judas remained unclean.

The celebration of the sacrament (or the ordinance) of the Last Supper (also called the Lord's Supper, Communion, and the Eucharist) reminds the followers of Jesus to clean their dirty feet again. They humbly and prayerfully ask Jesus to wash their feet once again as they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. When believers partake of the Lord's Supper, they remember once again that Jesus suffered, shed His blood, and died on the cross in their behalf. As the Savior of the world, Jesus sacrificed His life for the forgiveness of sins. As believers have learned and experienced, even as children of light in this world they still sometimes commit sins. While celebrating the Eucharist, believers can confess their sins, repent of their sins, and receive the assurance of God's forgiveness through His written Word. During communion, believers can remember once again these words of assurance in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

(John 13:11) For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, “Not all of you are clean.”

After three years of ministry with Jesus and despite all his advantages from being with Jesus personally, Judas continued walking in darkness as he accompanied the Light of the world. Jesus knew Judas, as He knew what was in everyone. Judas never deceived Jesus as to the type of person he was and that he would eventually betray Jesus. For these reasons, Jesus knew and could tell His disciples as they ate together that not all of them were clean. We only understand these things because we know the rest of the story about Jesus and prayerfully look forward to understanding more.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What two things did Jesus look forward to in the hour that had come?
2. How much does Jesus love His own? What does that mean to you?
3. What did Jesus know about the Father?
4. What can we learn about understanding the truths of God?
5. What did Peter want? What did Jesus say Peter, and everyone needs?

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