International Bible Study Commentary
Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible
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John 13:12-20 Commentary
New Revised Standard Version

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 13:12) After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?

In John 13:1-11, we learned how Jesus washed His disciples' feet, including the feet of Judas. Then, we related His cleansing to the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We made these interpretations based on reading the entire Gospel of John and the three synoptic gospels (what Jesus told His disciples they would later understand). In John 13:12-20, we will learn and apply some of what Jesus meant when He taught the disciples as much as they could understand at that point in His ministry.

There may be symbolism in Jesus "taking off" or "laying down" His outer robe to graciously and humbly wash His disciples' feet, because Jesus graciously and humbly "laid down" His life when He died on the cross to save us from our sins. Then, Jesus "put on" or "took up" His life when He rose from the dead. After returning to His dinner, Jesus began to explain what His actions should mean to His disciples in their relationship with each other and those they would serve as apostles in the Church.

(John 13:13) You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

As disciples (students), Jesus became their Teacher, but He also came as "The Teacher" of the world. All those who seek to follow Jesus' words and example as Jesus intended are His disciples. The Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers also had disciples who learned and passed on their teachings to others. Gamaliel was a teacher of Saul before Saul became a disciple of Jesus. After Jesus rose from the dead, He called Saul to become the Apostle Paul. Socrates was a teacher of Plato, who wrote books about the teaching of Socrates (books and teachings that many still study). Unlike Gamaliel and Plato, Jesus' teachings and very words are the messages or teachings that God the Father sent Him to share with the world, and believers and unbelievers still study Jesus' words (some to joyfully follow Him and some to hatefully dismiss Him as they try to destroy people's faith in Jesus).

Jesus claimed to be and is more than a teacher. He is more than a prophet or messenger sent from God. Jesus claimed to be and is "The Lord." As we have seen, see here, and will see again, Jesus applied the divine name "I Am" to himself. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God sent from the Father, and to prove who He claimed to be, Jesus performed signs that only God could perform—no one has been able to duplicate the works of Jesus or teach better Truths than Jesus. Just as Jesus, the Word made flesh, worked with the Father in creating all things that have been created, Jesus could speak only a word and heal the sick, feed the multitudes, and raise the dead. Jesus demonstrated that He is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and all creation. Christians are right to call Jesus their Teacher and their God, but Jesus will not truly be so for them if they refuse to do what He has taught His followers to do. Jesus said His disciples were right to call Him their Teacher and Lord. Jesus accepted the worship of Thomas when he worshiped Jesus and said in John 20:28, "My Lord and My God!" The children of Light do not walk in darkness when they study, believe, and follow (obey) Jesus' teachings in the Bible and His leadership as their Lord—the Holy Spirit will guide their understanding and empower them.

(John 13:14) So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

Remember how Jesus' disciples argued among themselves about who among them was the greatest (see the *International Bible Study Commentary* on John 13:4). To correct their ideas and behavior, Jesus wanted His disciples to wash one another's feet graciously and humbly; that is, to live and work together happily and be willing to serve each other and others no matter how small or how big the task. Some churches consider foot washing a sacrament (or ordinance) like Baptism and the commemoration of the Lord's Supper. In some churches, the pastors wash the feet of some designated church members and indicate the importance of Christians being willing to serve one another. In some churches, church members wash the feet of one another. A Bible study group or Sunday school class might discuss whether they should try to wash the feet of one another or not as part of their lesson on these verses, and then discuss their experience afterward. Reasons to do so or not do so would also make interesting discussion.

(John 13:15) For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Jesus could have given a thirty minute or longer sermon to teach His disciples the importance of serving one another and others; however, they should have learned to serve as Jesus served just by watching Him helping them and others as He met people's needs in His daily life. They may have disregarded Jesus' previous instructions about selfless service, and that may be one reason Jesus chose to teach them by a loving example instead of reprimanding them. Jesus knew His teaching with "words only" would not be as effective as "showing by example" what He expected of them, and then pointing out what He had done was an example for them to follow. He intended them (and all His subsequent disciples) to begin serving others as a way of life, not just that they should wash the feet of each other. As they followed Jesus and washed feet, Jesus may have also intended them to teach others about how He spiritually and morally cleansed His followers, and why believers needed to confess and repent of their sins to stay clean.

(John 13:16) Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them.

Since a master is perceived to be greater than a servant by “this world’s” evaluation (because a servant does what the master tells them and masters seldom serve servants), servants should not expect to be so above their master that they would refuse to do what their master asks or would do himself as their master—unless what the master asks and does is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Peter and John revealed the standard Jesus set for His disciples when they were on trial before the Sanhedrin (their religious authorities or “masters” in Jerusalem) by saying to these leaders in Acts 4:19-20, “Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (about and from Jesus).”As the Teacher, Jesus’ teachings and actions were always consistent with what the Father wanted taught and shown to His disciples and us. Jesus was their Master and our Master. As their Teacher and Lord, they acknowledged Jesus as their Master and they “intellectually” considered themselves His servants—until it came to serving one another as Jesus would serve them. Since Jesus, their Master, served as He did, even to the point of washing someone’s feet, and since they were not greater than their Master, who was their Teacher and their Lord, they needed (and we need) to learn how to serve others as Jesus did. We know the Apostle Peter learned this lesson well, for when a lame beggar asked Peter for a handout, Peter took “him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong” (Acts 3:7).

Similarly, a messenger is not greater than the one who sends him to deliver a message. Consider how Jesus never made himself greater than His Father who sent Him as His messenger into the world. Consider how Jesus never did anything contrary to the Law of Love or different from the way He expected people to act in compliance with the teaching of His Father. Jesus reliably communicated the message of God to His disciples, to the world, and to us in the Bible, and He sends the Holy Spirit into His disciples to help us understand the Bible. Too many make rules for others that they have no intention of following themselves. Every command of God that the Father and the Son have given us they follow and teach us by their example.

(John 13:17) If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

Jesus expected His disciples to have more than an "intellectual" belief, or a theological doctrine they could remember, or a statement of faith they could recite. Jesus expected His disciples to do what He taught them as their Teacher and Lord to save the world. He expected them to really consider Him their Lord and do what He said whether they understood all His reasons or not. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus' last words to His disciples before He ascended into heaven included their responsibility to teach others as He had taught them: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Christian faith begins with learning, believing, and receiving Jesus as the Son of God, as your Lord and Savior and as your Teacher who taught the truth. Remember what Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." True Christian faith motivates Jesus' followers to do things, as Jesus taught in John 13:17, and they are happy when they do things as Jesus taught. The Apostle Paul continued to write in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." If we learn and do as Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul taught and promised, we will be blessed. We will be happy. We will have a blessed day. The Apostle James also emphasized this truth in James 2:14, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?" Jesus promised blessedness and happiness to those who know and do "these things;" which means what He showed and told His disciples and what they have shown and told us, Jesus' followers, in the Bible.

(John 13:18) I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'

Without naming Judas as His betrayer at that time, Jesus then spoke of Judas, partly because Judas would become a prime example of one who had the opportunity to know "these things," but who chose not to do "these

things" that Jesus showed as an example and taught. Judas was not blessed or made happy when he betrayed Jesus for love of money; rather, Judas threw his money away and killed himself in misery. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that He had chosen each one of them and He had taught them the same truths together, but blessedness or happiness would only come from living on the basis of what He taught. They would not be happy or blessed by relying on their misguided feelings of exceptionalism for being chosen by Jesus to be one of His disciples. Jesus told them that He knew who He had chosen (including Judas) and one of them (Judas) would not only reject obeying Him but betray Him to His enemies. Why did Jesus tell them this? Jesus said He did so to fulfill the Scripture in Psalms 41:9, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me." Jesus knew that because of Judas' immoral unrepentant character, Judas would not change and Judas would betray Him in accordance with Old Testament prophecy.

(John 13:19) I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he.

As we read in the Greek New Testament, Jesus' words "I am" are to be preferred to the translation "I am he." Because Jesus is the LORD God, "I Am," Jesus made His divine foreknowledge known to His disciples because He knew that He would soon suffer betrayal and the authorities would arrest Him—leading to His crucifixion. He wanted them to know that He was not caught by surprise or had failed in His mission. His suffering and death were included in His mission to save us from the eternal consequences of our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Jesus wanted His disciples to know that as the Son of God He was also a true prophet of God. He would do what the Father wanted according to the Scriptures. Jesus expected His followers to do as He did and obey God according to the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit led them and reminded them of all He taught from and in fulfillment of the Scriptures.

(John 13:20) Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

As we have seen, by beginning a teaching with the words "Truly, truly," Very truly," or Amen, Amen," Jesus indicated a deeply serious and important teaching that He expected His followers to learn and obey from the heart. Earlier, Jesus taught that the Father had sent Him into the world, and those who accepted the Father would accept Him. Furthermore, anyone who accepted Jesus would accept the Father. Now, Jesus began to prepare His disciples to follow His plans for them. He would send them out into the world. Jesus would send the ones who would do as He taught out into the world to preach the good news about Him. Those who received them and the good news they taught would receive Jesus (they do not yet know that Jesus will soon leave them, and then they would be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to accompany them). Then, those who received Jesus because of their teaching would receive the Father who sent Him, and also receive the gift of eternal life. Jesus was bringing His disciples into His worldwide mission, but He would only bring in those who would do the things He taught—and Judas did not fit into that category.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Did the disciples know what Jesus did as He did it? What reason did Jesus give them for what He did? Did they understand more about what He did later?

2. What three titles best describe Jesus in these verses of Scripture?

3. Was Jesus a messenger? If so, how was Jesus a messenger? What kind of messengers did Jesus expect His disciples to be?

4. What did Jesus say servants were not greater than? What did Jesus say messengers were not greater than?

5. Why did Jesus tell His disciples about the fact that one of them would betray Him?

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