

# John 13-17: Living Life with an Invisible Savior

## John 13:1-17 The Humility of Love

January 8th, 2023

### I. Introduction

Every year Google analyzes the trends on its search engine and in 2022 they found that the top five word searches of the year were: 1) Wordle, 2) Election results, 3) Betty White, 4) Queen Elizabeth, and 5) Bob Saget.<sup>1</sup> They also listed the top trends for searches related to the news, people, definitions (e.g. rupee, oligarch, recession), and “how to” questions. Although these trends shed some interesting, and at times sad, insight into the hearts of humanity, they also reveal how popular of a tool Google is to people.

#### 1. What makes Google such a popular website?

If you ignore all of the data mining and surveillance Google conducts, it's a very powerful and convenient information resource. With it we can easily look up directions, how to spell words, definitions, grammar rules, we can look up bible verses, or even look up symptoms of illness and treatments. But as nice as this is, there are some questions Google can't answer for you.

What is God's will for my life? How can I find victory over sin and temptation? How do I keep the faith, persevere, and maintain joy when life is hard and full of suffering? How do I know if I am truly saved? How can I overcome fear of man to share the gospel with people I know? These are just a small sample of the challenging questions faced in the life and journey of every follower of Christ. The challenge isn't that there's no answer, it's just the answers aren't always easily found! As convenient as Google is, it cannot help us with all of our questions. It lacks the ability to give you the specific and nuanced answers tailored to you.

#### 2. What were some of the advantages the twelve disciples had while Jesus was on earth that we don't have today?

The disciples certainly got to experience these kinds of advantages through the privilege of being in Jesus' inner circle and ministering with him for three years. But this special opportunity wasn't going to remain the same forever. He explicitly warned them and foretold that He was going to suffer, die, and rise again. The disciples didn't fully understand what Jesus had come to do so they couldn't fathom a reality without their Messiah, their Savior and King, being physically present with them. But that's what was about to happen. Even though they weren't asking the questions they should have in light of his impending departure, Jesus answered the questions for them and they are recounted in the gospel of John.

The question that Jesus answers in John 13-17, the question the disciples didn't ask but should have, the question that we will study through this class is: **“How do you live life with an invisible Savior?”** Can you imagine what it was like, after having depended on Jesus' physical presence, guidance, and leadership for three years, suddenly taken away? You would feel as lost as a child whose parents are tragically killed in a car accident and you are now orphaned. That's the very language Jesus uses when he encourages the disciples saying he won't leave them as orphans.<sup>2</sup> What should have been the greatest concern of the disciples back then should be our concern today. The answers to this question are still of the greatest importance and relevance!

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<sup>1</sup> <https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2022/US/> (Accessed January 6, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> John 13:33; 14:18

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## II. Background & Context

In John 21:30-31, at the end of the Passion narrative, the apostle John wrote, “**30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**” (John 20:30–31 ESV)

3. How can you tell what is important to someone?
4. Based on these verses, what was important to John? Or in other words, what is his purpose, his goal, in writing this gospel?
5. Does this mean that the book is not meant for growing believers? Why or why not? (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15)

The apostle John (AKA “the disciple whom Jesus loved”)<sup>3</sup> wrote this gospel<sup>4</sup> near the end of his life for the purpose of evangelizing unbelievers and to be an apologetic that strengthened the faith of believers.

The beginning of chapter 13 marks a big transition point in John’s gospel. It marks the close of Jesus’ public ministry and focuses in on Jesus’ intimate ministry to His disciples. Out of 21 chapters, John devotes five of those chapters, almost 25% of his letter, to a few hours of Jesus’ life. This degree of emphasis indicates that what is taught in these chapters is of incredible importance to John and his audience. It also shows us the heart of our Savior and what He values most.

J.C. Ryle marveled at this section of Scripture when he wrote, “In every age the contents of these chapters have been justly regarded as one of the most precious parts of the Bible. They have been the meat and drink, the strength and comfort of all true-hearted Christians. Let us ever approach them with peculiar reverence.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John 13:23; 19:26, 27; 20:2-9; 21:1, 7, 20-24

<sup>4</sup> John 21:20-24; cf. 21:2

<sup>5</sup> J.C. Ryle, *John: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, Vol. 3 (The Banner of Truth Trust: Carlisle, PA, 2015), 1.

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## III. The Central Theme of John 13-17

*“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”*

(John 13:1 ESV)

6. Jesus himself had referred a few times to *“his hour”* before this point, and John mentions it several times.<sup>6</sup> What does the phrase refer to? (hint: what happened when Jesus departed?)<sup>7</sup>
7. What stands out about Jesus’ response to His omniscient knowledge of His impending departure?
8. Sometimes the writers of Scripture give clear signals to the main point they are trying to draw the reader’s attention.<sup>8</sup> Here, John is doing the same thing in verse 1. What is John wanting us to see throughout chapters 13-17?
9. Love is sometimes a hard thing to define. I love music, pizza, Chiefs football, Jayhawk basketball, my wife Candace and my children, and I love the church. What’s the problem with defining love based on what I just said?
10. Our world is obsessed with love. We hear “love” talked about in movies, songs, books, media, and all over the internet. How does the world define love?
11. How is the world’s definition contrasted with the Bible’s definition? (cf. John 3:16, 15:13 & 1 John 3:16; cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-8)
12. What does it mean that Jesus *“loved them to the end”*?
13. Your Bible may have a footnote on the phrase *“he loved them to the end”* to show an additional interpretation “he loved them to the uttermost” or “eternally.” How would that change your understanding meaning of the verse?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John 2:4; 7:6, 30; 8:30

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 2:5-12

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Luke 1:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:14-15

<sup>9</sup> Commentator Leon Morris points out that the meaning of this phrase in the Greek “is ambiguous, meaning both ‘to the end’ and ‘to the utmost’. It is likely that here we have a typical Johannine double meaning, with both meanings intended.” (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), 614)

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“The Lord **loved them to the end**. *Telos (end)* means "perfection," or "completeness," and signifies that Jesus loves His own with the fullest measure of love. There is a general sense in which God loves the world ([John 3:16](#)) of lost sinners ([Matt. 5:44-45](#); [Titus 3:4](#)), but He loves His own with a perfect, eternal, redeeming love—a love "which surpasses knowledge" ([Eph. 3:19](#)).”<sup>10</sup>

### 14. What are some of the ways Jesus manifested his love for His disciples to the end?<sup>11</sup>

William Hendriksen wrote, “In the full consciousness of the fact that he was about to return to the Father, Jesus, who had loved his own all along, knew that the proper time had arrived to reveal to them his love to the uttermost.”<sup>12</sup>

You can tell what is most important to a person based on what they talk about. We’ve seen what’s important to John. Now we have seen what’s important to Jesus and what will be the overarching theme throughout John 13-17. As Leon Morris summarizes, “Up till now Jesus has had a ministry to men in general. From this point He concentrates on those He loves intimately.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, John 12-21, WORDsearch 11, p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> See John 13:2-5, 14:1-3, 16; 14:29, 15:8-11; 16:1; 17:17, 20, 24

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), 227.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), 614.

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## IV. Humble Love

***“2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:2–5 ESV)***

With full knowledge of his looming betrayal, that his disciples did not understand the Messiah’s path to the cross, that the disciples would all desert him, and that the crucifixion lie before him, Jesus started his final evening with his disciples by humbly loving them through foot washing.

Hendriksen explains the historical background for foot washing well:

Jesus and the disciples have come from Bethany. The feet, protected only by sandals, had become partly exposed to sand and dust. They were dirty, or at least uncomfortable. In such circumstances, the washing of the feet was customary. The host, though not himself performing this service, would generally see to it that it was performed. It was, after all, a menial task, that is, a task to be discharged by a servant.<sup>14</sup>

- 15.** What stands out to you about this scene? What was so significant about Jesus washing the disciples’ feet?

D.A. Carson noted the significance when he wrote, “With such power and status at his disposal, we might have expected him to defeat the devil in an immediate and flashy confrontation, and to devastate Judas with an unstoppable blast of divine wrath. Instead, he washes his disciples’ feet, including the feet of the betrayer.”<sup>15</sup>

In what can be described as “biblical slow motion,” John gives a very detailed description of Jesus’ humble love in verses 3-5 as he begins to wash 12 pairs of dirty feet.

### **a. Jesus’ Example of Humble Love**

- 16.** Before dinner began, as the disciples were walking to the upper room and preparing to be seated, Luke 22:24 describes the scene this way, ***“A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”*** What insight does this verse give to us about why none of the disciples were washing feet?

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<sup>14</sup> Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 228.

<sup>15</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), 462.

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As D.A. Carson wrote, “Doubtless the disciples would have been happy to wash [Jesus’] feet; they could not conceive of washing one another’s feet, since this was a task normally reserved for the lowliest of menial servants. Peers did not wash one another’s feet, except very rarely and as a mark of great love.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite Jesus’ prior teachings, the disciples continued to measure greatness based on status rather than service.<sup>17</sup> They were so occupied with their own pride and selfishness that they failed to serve Jesus who is the only one truly worthy. Their lack of humble love toward one another translated into lack of love for Jesus.

**15.** What are some ways we might be tempted to refuse serving others because of our pride?<sup>18</sup>

**16.** In what ways is Jesus’ response to the disciple’s sin encouraging to us today? (cf. John 13:1)

John Calvin summarized it well, “And though he will afterwards explain more clearly for what purpose Christ washed the feet of his disciples, yet, before doing so, [John] states in a single word, that the Lord testified, by this visible sign, that the love with which he embrace them was firm and lasting; that, though they were deprived of his presence, they might still be convinced that death itself would not quench this love. This conviction ought now to be fixed also in our hearts.”<sup>19</sup>

### **b. Jesus’ Spiritual Lesson Symbolized**

*“6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.” 8 Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.”” (John 13:6–8 ESV)*

**17.** Why did Peter resist and refuse Jesus washing his feet?

**18.** According to Jesus’ words in verse 7, what was the wrong thinking Peter had about Jesus that led to his refusal? (cf. Is. 53:4-6; Matt. 20:28)

**19.** According to verse 8, what greater truth was Jesus pointing to through the feet washing?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 462.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 20:25-28

<sup>18</sup> Lk. 14:8-11; Phil. 2:3-4; James 2:1-4;

<sup>19</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Vol. 2 (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), 54.

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 51:2, 7; Isa. 1:18; Ezek. 36:25-27; Eph. 5:6; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22

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***“9 Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’ 10 Jesus said to him, ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.’ 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’”*** (John 13:9–11 ESV)

20. Peter, the disciple with the foot-shaped mouth, impulsively changes his tune and asks Jesus to wash his whole body. Even though Peter might have missed the spiritual point, he exhibits child like faith and essentially says, “Whatever you say I need Jesus, I want all of it!” What incredibly important truth does Jesus teach in verse 10?<sup>21</sup>

“In vv. 6-8 the footwashing symbolizes the cleansing that is the result of Christ’s impending cross-work. But Peter’s unrestrained (and thoughtless) exuberance opens up the opportunity to turn the footwashing to another point: the initial and fundamental cleansing that Christ provides is a once-for-all act. Individuals who have been cleansed by Christ’s atoning work will doubtless need to have subsequent sins washed away, but the fundamental cleansing can never be repeated.”<sup>22</sup>

### a. Jesus’ Spiritual Command Symbolized

***“12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.’”*** (John 13:12–17 ESV)

21. What is the command Jesus gives his disciples in verse 14? Does Jesus create a new ordinance of footwashing? Why or why not? (hint: see verse 15)
22. Stuart Scott defines humility as “The mindset of Christ (a servant’s mindset): a focus on God and others, a pursuit of the recognition and the exaltation of God, and a desire to glorify and please God in all things and by all things He has given.”<sup>23</sup> If humility is the key to loving like Jesus, how can we repent of pride and grow in humility?<sup>24</sup>
23. If the slave is not greater than His master, what do we communicate if we regard any particular task as beneath us?
24. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, ***“34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** In light of this verse, why is humble love significant for believers to exhibit?

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<sup>21</sup> Col. 2:13; 1 John 1:7, 9; Heb. 10:12, 14

<sup>22</sup> Carson, 465.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Scott, *The Exemplary Husband* (Focus Publishing: Bemidji, MN, 2002), 187.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. 5:15; Phil. 2:3-12; James 4:7-10

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## V. Conclusion

Through a shockingly humble act, Jesus teaches us that we are to live life with an invisible Savior by humbly loving our fellow believers. This is the only suitable response to those who have experienced Christ's love. We are to live in the fellowship of the cleansed and demonstrate the same humble love Jesus showed us. This is one of the ways Jesus continues to manifest His love toward us even though He is not physically present. Our identification as believers, our love for Jesus, and our joy is wrapped up in our obedience to this command.

D.A. Carson summarizes our response to Christ's humble love this way, "But now that Jesus, their *Lord and Teacher*, has washed his disciples' feet – an unthinkable act! – there is every reason why they *also should wash one another's feet*, and no conceivable reason for refusing to do so...no emissary has the right to think he is exempt from tasks cheerfully undertaken by the one who sent him, and no slave has the right to judge any menial task beneath him after his master has already performed it."<sup>25</sup>

Frederick Lehman's hymn "The Love of God," written in 1917, has a powerful third verse that describes the love God this way:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
and were the skies of parchment made;  
were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill,  
and ev'ryone a scribe by trade;  
to write the love of God above  
would drain the ocean dry;  
nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
though stretched from sky to sky.

The language beautifully captures and restates the very last verse of the gospel of John:

***"Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."*** (John 21:25 ESV)

### Application:

Living life with an invisible Savior means we humbly love our fellow believers, as well as our enemies, just as Jesus has humbly loved us.

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<sup>25</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 467-68.