

Open Heart, Open Bible

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

Passage for weekly reading (week 24):

John ch. 's 13 – 16

I AM the way and the truth and the life (14 v.6)

I AM the true vine (15 v.1)

Jesus said in John 10 v.4 that His sheep follow Him because they “know his voice”. In this week’s passage we get plenty of practice in hearing and recognising that voice because it is the longest uninterrupted session of our Lord’s teaching that we have in the whole of Scripture, excepting the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel. I’ve been recently to both a day and a weekend seminar, occasions which help me to receive God’s word in a more concentrated way than I can in a weekly service, simply because there is a longer and more concentrated opportunity to focus on hearing God. The delegates are, as it were, “shut in” to listen without interruption to the invited speaker. So it was for the disciples here, and Jesus begins the session with a remarkable demonstration – the Master actually washing the feet of those who would have thought of themselves as servants, as pupils, as trainees. We have seen throughout John’s Gospel how signs and teaching sections have complemented each other, and so it is here, for He is amongst them as One who serves (Luke 22 v.27). Not that the washing of the disciples feet was a “sign” as such, but it certainly gave the most telling of visual aids to portray what Jesus was wanting them to understand. In His example, the Lord clearly reverses the roles of master and servant, and gives His closest followers a living demonstration that they will never forget. Clearly, His authority works from the bottom up, not from the top down; it offers as a basis of support, as opposed to a hierarchy of control; and it can only be effective amongst loving friendships, rather than within cliques of vested interests.

In this final act before Gethsemane, Jesus showed them “the full extent of His love” (v.1). He left them “an example”, that they should do the same (v.15). This may or may not mean literal feet-washing gatherings, but it certainly means a love one for another which alone can demonstrate to the onlooking world that Jesus is alive in His followers. The verses are worth quoting:

A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. Bt this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (v. 's 34,35).

Although the disciples cannot come where the Lord is going (v.33), He is nevertheless going with them very much in mind -i.e.- to prepare a place for them(14 v.2). Thomas and Philip now question Jesus, following on from Peter, and Thomas's question leads directly to His sixth "I Am" assertion – **the way, the truth and the life**. Only He can lead us to the Father. Other religions may lead people to a god of sorts, but none can lead us to the Father.

In replying to Philip, Jesus says that He is the Father's revelation of Himself (v.9). The Father lives in the Son, and does His work through Him. This is the way the Christian life works for us – Father and Son indwelling us by the Spirit, and doing their work through us (v.23). Therefore, we can do the things that Jesus did (v.12). The Father wants to reveal His glory through us, just as He revealed his glory through Jesus. To this end, He will send the Spirit of truth (v.17), who will then be our Teacher, in place of the incarnate Jesus (13 v.13).

The emphases which come out of the washing of the disciples' feet are love and obedience (14 v.15). Jesus was obeying His Father in doing what He did, but because He loved His Father, as well as His disciples, the obedience aspect of the act was not difficult. Jesus tells them that the fruit of love and obedience will be answered prayer (14 v.13). The joy of this is incalculable.

They are about to leave after this session (v.31), but another illustration occurs to our Lord before the discussion ends. We can be glad that it did, because it is one of the most beautiful and easy-to-understand verbal pictures that He ever bequeathed to us – **the vine and the branches** (the seventh and final "I Am"). In this, He is telling us of the crucial importance of abiding in Him, and He again says that, as we do, we will know the joy of answered prayer. (The N.I.V. uses the word "remaining". K.J.V. uses the word "abiding", which I prefer). As we do, we are in continual receipt of His life-giving refreshment, and must bear fruit as an obvious consequence. Fruit-bearing is therefore seen as a result of being, and much less of doing. A branch cannot "do" anything; it just "is". We become naturally supernatural, to coin somebody else's phrase. We bear fruit because we are grafted in to the life of Jesus. The one thing that we must submit to is regular pruning, to keep us spiritually healthy, and to prevent the tree from choking on itself. Branches which die are cut off, so regular pruning is essential!

The other thing to be aware of is that the world hates the real thing (v.18), because we do not belong to it, or accept its values. The finished work of Jesus removes any excuse for sin (v.22), in a way which had not been made clear before. Those who have found this way (14 v.6) must testify to it, for the Father can and will use that testimony to further His work and fulfil His purposes. The Holy Spirit of God will enable this testimony (15 v.27). Trouble will lie ahead for those who follow the Master closely (16 v.'s 1- 4), but the Spirit in them will bring glory to both Jesus and the Father (v.'s 14,15).

Within this passage is our Lord's description of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world after His departure, convicting of "**guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment**". People have to be moved in this way before they become aware of their need of salvation. It is the Spirit's work. We further it in prayer. We cannot do it ourselves (see Matt.19 v.'s 25,26)!

Jesus then prepares the disciples for the grief of Calvary in the analogy of the woman giving birth. There is a sense in which He Himself is going to "give birth" shortly -i.e.- to the Church of which He will be the Head. This cannot happen, however, until the Holy Spirit is released to begin building that Church in His name (John 7 v.'s 38,39). Then, His followers will have the same relationship with His Father that He had, and (He repeats yet again) will know the joy of answered prayer (16 v.24). The disciples break through to a place of understanding, and He warns them again that trouble lies ahead. Peace such as the world can never give will nevertheless be the portion of those who follow Him.

Food for thought / discussion / prayer

1) Having taught the disciples the essential principle of following Him (dying to oneself in order to live in Him – 12 v.24), our Lord now powerfully illustrates to them the nature of servanthood, which is what dying to self is all about. The illustration is the act of washing their feet. They must have been ashamed of their arguments about who was going to be the greatest (Luke 22 v.24) when their "**Lord and Teacher**" (v.14) humbled Himself in this way. How do you work out your call to servanthood within the Body of Christ? Does it represent, for you, a laying down of your life? Are you doing it for praise from others, or praise from God (5 v.44 and 12 v.43)? Can anyone share along these lines?

2(a) Those who have come to a place of "abiding" will produce lasting fruit. Their fruitfulness is the evidence of their spirituality. Have I come to that place? Have you? Let's pray that we be permanently grafted in to the Vine who is Jesus, so that our lives produce the fruit that the Father intends. Don't forget that the Father is the Gardener. Fruit that the Gardener produces is never perishable!

2(b) What does the Lord mean when He speaks of "pruning"? Have you been pruned recently?

4) Four times throughout this discourse, Jesus says that those who obey his teaching will have the joy of answered prayer. The main obstacle to this joy is condemnation, which usually is the product of sin or disobedience (see 1 John 3 v.'s 21,22). How confident am I before God? Am I allowing anything (or anybody?) to steal from the joy I have as an obedient follower of Jesus, so dearly loved of the Father?

Next week's passage: John 17

