

Jesus himself explains the meaning of his death.

John 13:1-15

Maundy Thursday 2020

This sermon was not preached but put on our web site for your own private meditation. I have spoken it in years past and hope that the Lord may use it again to bless you.

09.04.20 Jesus himself explains the meaning of his death.
John 13:1-15

It is **Thursday evening**. The sun has gone down. The Upper Room is laid in readiness for **the meal**. Jesus and his disciples have come in from the dusty streets. **Their sandalled feet** are dirty and uncomfortable. Here stands the **pitcher** and wash-basin – and there lies the long linen **towel**.

But there's **no servant here** to do the menial task of kneeling, undoing their sandal-straps and **washing their feet**. One of the disciples ought to perform the task. But **no one stirs**. A few moments ago **they were arguing** among themselves about **who is greatest**. (Luke 22:24)

Now each is hoping **someone else** will make the first move. One disciple is even set on **treachery**. Upon his person – **in that very room** – are the 30 pieces of silver, the price of his betrayal. But none of the other disciples know or suspect it.

Jesus waits a long time. The food is already on the table. Still no one moves. **Then Jesus acts**. Calmly he rises and removes his clothes, until he wears only **the loin-cloth of a slave**. He ties the towel about his waist, pours out the water, kneels and **begins to wash the disciples' feet** and dry them on the towel. A shocked, embarrassed silence fills the room. Until Jesus comes to Peter.

Jesus acts as PROPHET:

What is this action that Jesus is doing? Jesus knows his hour has come. *I came from the Father and entered the world: now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.* (John 16:28)

Jesus has loved these men: now he will reveal to them the full extent of his love. **In symbol and in reality** Jesus is fulfilling the work his Father sent him to do. Now he consecrates himself for its completion. **He is about to lay down his life** for his friends. It will not be **taken by someone else** – even though he is **betrayed**. Not by the malice of Satan or the scheming of his enemies – for **this is**

what he came into the world to do. Jesus **knows** he is the Lamb of God. He **knows** he has authority to lay down his life – and to take it again. (*John 1:29; 10:17-18*)

*You don't realise now, Peter, what I am doing, but later you will understand.... Unless I **wash** you, you have no part with me.*

We can't **understand** – or receive – **the love of Jesus** – until we see it in relation to **the Cross**. His love isn't a sentimental feeling – or even natural affection – but **a deep commitment of his whole person** to us, to each of us, whatever the cost.

Because our hearts are cold and our minds confused, **we need things made plain**. Here Jesus stands as a **PROPHET**, in final succession to all those of the Old Testament. They used symbolic actions to get their messages across. So now does Jesus. And what he **teaches** is **love** – sacrificial love. A love that knows **our greatest need is cleansing from** the guilt, the penalty and the power of **sin**. For we have all sinned (*Rom 3:23*) and **cannot** put ourselves right with God. (*John 3:36; 13:8; Rom 3:20; Psa 143:2*)

Steeped in the words of the prophets before him – Jesus **knows** he must be betrayed, even by one of his own. (*Luke 22:21,22; Psa 41:9*) He **knows** (and quotes Zechariah) that he is the Shepherd whom the Lord will strike – and the sheep will be scattered. And, of course, he knows the Lord there, is God his Father. (*Zech 13:7; Matt 26:31*)

He **knows** and says (quoting Isaiah) – he will be numbered with the transgressors – to drink the cup of the Lord's anger – as the Lord lays upon him the iniquity of us all. (*Luke 22:37; Isa [51:22]; 53:12,6; Matt 20:22*) And **Jesus is willing** to go through with it – because it is the **will of his Father**, who loves him – and **who loves us**.

Afterwards, **when Jesus has died for us** – then the Father's **gift of his Spirit** will be given to those whom Jesus has cleansed – those who love and obey Jesus. And the **fruit** of the Spirit will be **love**. *Love each other as I have loved you... Now that I, your **Lord** and*

teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash – go on washing – one another's feet. I have set you an example.

Jesus acts as KING:

Your Lord. Jesus' action is also **KINGLY**. But not according to the pattern of this world. Earthly kings receive their authority from **men** – who honour those who exert power. Such kings **exalt themselves** above the people – whom they oppress. (*Luke 22:25*) In Rome they address **Caesar** as *My Lord and my God*, for he is declared **divine**, holding together the worlds of men and gods. But it is all **illusion**, the invention of men.

The **true King** receives his authority from **God**. The true king **loves** his people and sacrifices himself for them. His **greatest glory** is seen in his **greatest humiliation**. It is not in symbol alone that Jesus strips himself and takes **the form of a slave**. He is already identifying himself with us – in **our bondage** to sin. It is taking him to the Cross – with its accusation: *This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.* (*Matt 27:37*)

Already **Jesus has begun to wrestle with Satan** on our behalf. Satan has desired to **have** over-confident, self-willed Peter – who **could** see the incongruity in his Lord washing his feet – but **not** in his, Peter's, trying to dictate to Jesus. *But I have prayed for you,* said Jesus – and **he does the same for each one of us.** (*Lk 22:31,32*)

We **need** the One who is mightier than us, who has defeated our foe, **who will set us free – to love and serve him**. We are called to be his witnesses – even his martyrs.

Jesus acts as PRIEST:

But Jesus' **own** death is **no** martyrdom. For he is acting as a **PRIEST** when – at this meal – **he puts aside the Passover Lamb and substitutes himself**. For 13 centuries men had looked back to that mighty deliverance in Egypt. Countless lambs had been slain – but none of **their** blood can deliver God's people from the judgement of the Last Day. **Only the blood of the one perfect Lamb can**

provide cover, so that the Angel of Death will pass over us. (*Heb 10:4; 9:12-14; Exod 12:23 [cf 1 Chron 21:14-17]*)

Every Passover the temple priests examine the lambs for ritual purity and perfection – but **none tomorrow will see before him God's morally spotless and perfect sacrifice**. Only at his own hands will Jesus offer up to God his broken body and outpoured blood – **his perfect life** in a once-for-all exchange for ours, that are forfeit, because we are sinners. (*Heb 9:11-12; 10:5-10,12; Gal 3:10-13*)

So now – as a **PRIEST**, who loves us tenderly and who knows our every weakness (*Heb 4:15*); – **Jesus takes the bread and wine** and invests these symbols with meaning. *This is my body which is given for you... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins.* (*Luke 22:19-20; Matt 26:26-28*) He does it so we shall **remember him**.

But the Old Testament does not allow **any** remembrance, **any** memorial, except **in the name of the LORD** – only **his** name is to be exalted. (*Deut 5:7-11; 10:14-21; 16:22; 28:58; Isa 2:11; 12:4*) But Jesus **knows** he is doing the Father's will. **Passover**, down the centuries, really looked forward to **him** – and from now on men will look back to **him** and to the Cross. It is **Father and Son together**, whose name we exalt. **Both gave** – that we might live and not die.

Jesus also takes the bread and wine so that he may **give them to us** to eat and drink. We **can only live if we** eat and drink – that is, and that is the true meaning of this action, **if we receive** what **Jesus** – our great High Priest – **has done for us**, and receive **HIM** as our Saviour and King. (*John 6:35,40; 47-63; 7:37*)

The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me. (*Gal 2:20*) **What kingly love!** Be embraced by this love! He values and loves us utterly. Let us receive his cleansing, his washing. It will cost **us** all our pride and self-will – but it cost **Jesus** everything. Let us ask for his Spirit – so that we may love him and one another – as he loved us.

Amen.