

## Four Interruptions

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The communications of John 13 and John 14 were given to His disciples in the house where the Lord celebrated the last Passover. His love was about to lead them out from this world — with all its wondrous record of the mercies and ways of God, and all its sad story of the hatred, treachery, and failure of man — to the Father. He had first made Himself dear to them by the glories and graces recorded in John 1-12, gathered them round Him as sheep around a beloved Shepherd; and then by departing would cause a movement of their hearts in the direction He took. Ultimately they were to be with Him, as John 17: 24 shows; but in the meantime every facility was to be furnished for the flow of affection between Himself and His followers.

The last testimony was borne to the world in John 12, and was rejected as the first had been. In John 13 we seem to enter a retreat where Jesus is alone with His disciples. In faithfulness to His own institutions for Israel He takes the passover supper; and having thus completed His relations with the earth for the time being, He prepares for the entire change from the Jewish position to the Christian by girding Himself for service and washing the disciples' feet. This was not for the correction of failure; we should lose greatly by supposing that this washing of the feet is for reasons of breakdown in walk. The dust of travel is one thing, the soil of sin is another. No one would accuse the Eastern traveller of *wrong* when he reached his friend's house with dusty feet. Comfort and suitability required that the traces of his journey be removed, in order that he might not be distracted in his host's presence by any thought of his own untidiness; the washing of feet was as much necessary for the visitor's comfort as it was in keeping with and in suitability for the divans of the host's house. The Lord was to introduce His disciples into the Father's things and into the atmosphere of the Father's house, and love would make them perfectly at home there, free to enter without distraction into each of the thoughts of Divine love.

How often when we go to a *meeting* are we quite a time before we get into the spirit of it. Our minds revert to the circumstances out of which we have come, our homes, our families, our business, our work for the Lord. It is the same when we would fain have a quiet time *alone* with the Lord. Our thoughts wander away to memories of earth, past experiences, persons, places, books — things which in themselves are perfectly right, but which at that time, and in view of what we are then seeking, are intrusions, things out of keeping with the communion we long for. In all this there need not be sin; it is the dust of *earth* which clings to us as the result of our travel across it. But obviously it distracts us in the matter of communion with the Lord in His own things; and here comes in the Lord's gracious personal service to wash our feet; i.e., to remove from our minds the memory and thought of the way we have been travelling, and to bring about by His word the displacement of this "dust," so that we may be free and happy and undistracted before Him in the new position He has taken in resurrection.

The major operation of bathing, the Lord refers to in John 13: 10. This seems to cover the great work of regeneration when the Word of God is applied for our conversion to God, with all that it implies. It is the time when our whole being is brought under the power of God's truth; when, as with Naaman bathed in the waters of Jordan and made anew, we first submit to the Son of God, trust in His death for us, are cleansed, and receive eternal life. This is once for all.

But the need of feet washing remains. For though we have eternal life, the enjoyment of that life is often intercepted by the things of earthly life and service. Nothing but the love of the Lord on the one hand, and His very gracious service in feet washing on the other, can give us sustained enjoyment in

the Father's things. And what the Lord does in this way for us, we should each seek to be spiritually capable of doing for each other. Be it noted that only He who abode in His Father's love was capable of washing *all* His disciples' feet; and only when we are sufficiently near to the Lord are we capable of so helping another saint. This is the minor operation which is repeated as often as may be necessary.

In John 13: 30 Judas goes out. Love's last service has been laid at his feet, only to be spurned, and he goes out into the betrayer's night. The contrast becomes very marked between the communion of the world outside in its thoughts and purposes of evil, and the communion of this other world inside, where the thoughts and purposes of love are unfolded. JESUS was alone with His true disciples.

John 13: 31 then begins the most intimate disclosures, where the Lord in unreserved confidence speaks of all that is in His heart. How privileged are those whose feet are washed and whose hearts are true.

The Lord prefaces His communications by deep unfoldings of the meaning of His wondrous death. Not now the human side of it as in the foretellings of the other Gospels, the betrayal, the shame, the spitting, the crucifixion. It is here presented as the glory of the Son of Man; the crowning presentation to God of the Son of man in a love that did not falter and an obedience that would not fail. He presents it also as that by which God should be glorified every day in the bright glory of God Himself brought into fullest and deepest display, so fully revealed that God would owe it to JESUS to glorify Him in response; the Son delighting to honour God, and God delighting to honour JESUS. But in this none could be at His side; He is alone in atonement and in this supreme act which reveals God and secures glory to Him in the scene of man's sin.

Simon Peter is the first one to interrupt. Knowing that His Master was dear to him, and dearer than his own life, he avails himself of the intimacy afforded by the Lord's grace, and proffers his company and his assistance, his devoted assistance, in this approaching moment. Poor Peter! say we. Had it been possible for ardent love to bring another to the Lord's assistance in the great work of bringing glory to God in this world of sin, and in relation to sin, Peter had been the man. But while the Lord stands for God in the breach, not only does Peter recede from the position, following afar off, but in the end repudiates- the One he loved, and invokes a curse on himself for the very suggestion of possessing a link with Him. He denied his Lord with oaths and curses. How truly was the Lord alone; and how truly His love distances that of His most ardent disciple. Single-handed He laid the foundations of blessing, and constructed the road into blessing and the Father's House.

Thomas, materialistic Thomas, next interrupts. JESUS had spoken first of His death as glorifying God; then of the Father's house into which He would enter in risen life, not for Himself alone but as preparing the place for them too; assuring them, further, as proof of His deep love for them that He would personally come again to usher them into it, that they might ever be with them. This may seem clear enough to us when we read it in communion with God. But Thomas failed to grasp its meaning; not apprehending the Lord's objective, the place into which the Lord was travelling through death and resurrection to have them with Him, he asked, "How can we know the way?" The Lord goes beyond his question in the answer for He says, "I am the way, the truth and the life," and adds, "no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." With the eye steadily fixed on JESUS we can read the Way. Dying alone out of life here, He rose again, not alone; Head of a new Race now, His true disciples are associated with Him as the risen Man; and He has ascended to His Father. But it is after such a fashion that the One who is His Father is our Father too, the One who is His God is our God. We are given the same place in relation to His Father and God as He has in relation to Him (John 20: 17). The steps He has trodden in reaching that objective are an education to us; and while the position is defined for us in the

place that JESUS has taken, it seems clear that for the practical enjoyment of that position we need to learn the lessons which His death out of this world, His resurrection, and His ascension, so plainly teach us. But He is not only the Way, He is the Truth also, He is the Exposition to us of all that the Father is. The Father's name, character, love, glory, purposes, are all completely revealed in the Lord Jesus, so that in proportion as we study the Lord Jesus in His new position do we become instructed as to the Father; and acquaintance with the Father makes the Father's house doubly dear to us. Finally, He is the Life. For, after all, neither the Father's house where JESUS has gone, nor the Father Himself, could be understood or enjoyed now or hereafter, had we not the life that is suited to that enjoyment. In JESUS we see a life of relationship and affection which is wholly in consonance with the place into which He has entered; and as those who have been identified with Him in His death for us, and through faith in that death, we participate with Him in life. We are of His order; eternal life is ours. And it is life *eternal* in order that we might know the Father and Jesus Christ His sent One (John 17: 4).

Philip is a third interrupter; yet always in the intimacy of love, and giving the Lord His due place. "Lord," he says, "show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Slowly do our minds rise to the conception of the majesty of Godhead glory. Little do we apprehend of the relations between Divine Persons. If we thought to see the Father in a form different from the Son, or the Spirit in some independent form, would it not divide our attention at once? In JESUS all the fulness was pleased to dwell; in Him we see the gracious and mighty activities of the Spirit, and in Him all the glory of the Father. The Lord patiently explains to Philip that in Him as a Man here, and in His communications and activities, He was a complete and blessed setting forth of all that the Father is. His words were the Father's words; His works were the Father's works; He was before the disciples' eyes, but the Father was in Him, and He in the Father. In looking at JESUS the Son as Man here, they were looking on what the Father is, for there is no disparity between the Father and the Son. The Son is the Son, the Father is the Father, the Spirit is the Spirit, yet is the Father revealed in the Son. It is privilege untold that we may behold Jesus, follow Him in the recorded details of His life here, and feel that we are in contact with the Father in every word and work.

Judas brings in the last interruption to the ministry of the Lord in the upper chamber. He voices the inquiry which we all long to have answered, "How is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" Of His public manifestation to the world we are told in a hundred places. The Jewish mind was ever looking forward to it. But here the Lord had brought together two seemingly contrastive ideas, "the world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me," and again, "I will manifest Myself to him." How reconcile His concealment from the world and His manifestation to the individual? This is subsequent to the Lord's intimation of the coming of the Comforter (verses 16, 17). "Ye see Me" is the privilege of disciples, open to all. The subjective state of the disciples, which would enable them to enjoy the manifestation of the Lord, is found in verse 21. While the world is not able to see Christ, the disciple is allowed the manifestation of Him. Heart-love to the Son of God produces obedience to His commandments; and where obedience to the revealed will of the Lord is the fruit of love to Him He vouchsafes the disclosure of Himself, His glories, His offices, His graces. The cloud or fog may intercept the fair shining of the sun, but when the veil of fog or cloud is removed, the sun's brightness is revealed and the sun's warmth is felt. Yet even this external revelation of Himself to the obedient and loving heart is not the whole extent of the thoughts of love. It is as though the Father and the Son were yearning for closer intimacy than the mere revelation of glory could admit of, and propose to make the disciple the dwelling place of their affection even though he be still actually on earth. For this, with this in view, the Lord says to Judas, in reply to his question, "If a man love Me, he will keep My word" — i.e., love not only obeys when it has a direct commandment as suggested in verse 21, but when through a deeper acquaintance with its Object it becomes acquainted with His tastes and the whole revelation

for which He is set, it acts with the intuition of what is acceptable to His mind. It may have a commandment, and then it acts in swift obedience; it may not have a commandment, and yet through intimacy with its Object does instinctively the right thing and avoids the thing distasteful to Christ. Where there is this spiritual sensitiveness, the keeping of "My word" (as it should read in verse 23), the Father responds to this affection for the Son, gives a peculiar sense of His (the Father's) love, and Father and Son come in holy and happy freedom and unreserved delight, to hallow as Their "mansion" the individual who thus loves JESUS. Of communion so rare and sweet, of such a foretaste of heaven itself on earth, who can write or say much? It is remarkable of those raised from the dead, none have told us their experience when in Hades. Paul, caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, heard unspeakable things which it is not lawful for man to utter. Human language fails to utter "fulness of joy" as found in God's presence, or "pleasures for evermore" as found at God's right hand (Ps. 16.). If in Psalm 36: 1-4 we get the machinations of evil (in the midst of which Judas would find himself in going outside in John 13: 30), in the latter half of the Psalm may we not see something of the joy of the true disciple with his God? "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou wilt make them drink of the river of Thy Edens." (For the word translated "pleasures" in our Bibles is the plural of Eden in Gen. 2, God's Edens!) One Eden, once seen in this poor world, has left us all hankering for its renewal. The lowly disciple to whom Christ is everything may have the presence of the Father and the Son, with all of Divine delights that Their presence brings, Edens of Divine delight; the river of God's Edens flowing into and through the soul.

May writer and reader drink of the river of His pleasures more and more. Then will there be the blessed ministry of the Comforter; as found in John 14: 36; then daily, hourly peace in the midst of the world's unrest (verse 27); then joy in the Lord's exaltation in the Father's presence (verse 28); then the acceptance of the Lord's own path of faith, love, and obedience, in this world in which Satan rules (verses 29-31). Then can we come out from our sacred intercourse with the Lord where He is, to be here for Him in the place where He was.

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