

## All In: #11 “M for Mature Audiences” – John 13

Dr. Matt Cassidy – 11/6/2011

If you look in your bulletins, you will notice that today’s sermon is entitled “M for Mature Audiences” and I know a lot of you are pretty excited about what we will talk about today. But we won’t be talking about that; we will be talking about other things.

I entitled the sermon this way because in John 13 in this story of Jesus recorded by John, Jesus changes the tone and even the audience. From this point forward, He is going to be talking just to the people who are His most committed followers. He will say some staggering things and not everyone will be able to receive it or get it.

Even today, there will be a number of you who will completely not understand what we are going to be talking about. There will be others who will say: *I understand what you are saying but it does not apply to me. It is different. I don’t have to do that in my relationships.* You will see that it is a very difficult thing to read about, to deeply comprehend, and then more difficult still is to apply John 13.

### **Myth of The Gold Ring of Gyges**

To help you understand the context or a deeper understanding of this chapter, I think it would be helpful to remind you of a story between Socrates and Glaucon, and it is recorded in Plato’s *Republic*. Plato’s brother, Glaucon, is in this teaching time with Socrates and the question is posed – *What is the nature of man? What is the essence? What goes on in a human soul?* Socrates was not the least bit flattering. He essentially said that there is really no difference between the just and the unjust, except that the just are simply afraid of getting caught. The just would do anything and everything the unjust would do; the only thing that withholds them from becoming that way is their fear of consequences.

They had a little more debate back and forth. Socrates says: Do you remember the parable of Gyges? He tells the story of a shepherd boy, a teenager, maybe 20 something who was known for his purity and kindness of heart. While tending the sheep one night, there was a terrible storm and additionally an earthquake. When the shepherd went back to the fields the next morning, there was a giant crevice which had opened up the ground. He noticed, when he looked down into the crevice, there was a cave inside. So Gyges climbed down into the cave. In the cave was this giant bronze horse, like the Trojan horse because it literally had doors fitted into it. Gyges wedges those doors open, goes inside the horse, and sees the skeletal remains of a giant king. Gyges looked at his armor and all of his glory. He was turning to walk away, just having marveled at all he had seen, and then he notices on the finger of the

king this golden ring. So Gyges took the ring and put it on his own finger and went back to tending his flock.

All the shepherds would meet with the king of Lydia monthly and give account for the sheep that belonged to the king. When Gyges went in for his monthly review, he started playing with the ring on his finger. When he turned the bezel of the ring towards his palm, he became invisible. People started to speak about him as though he was not in the room. He was startled by that. He turned the ring back so the bezel was on the outside again and he was visible again.

Then he thought it was an isolated situation so he played with the ring a little more, even out in the fields when he was with his flocks. Gyges realized he had with this ring the supernatural power of becoming invisible.

So, what did Gyges do with that? Well, he looked forward to the next meeting at the king's castle. He would turn the bezel of the ring inward towards his palm and become invisible. He then seduced the queen. After that, he plotted with the queen to kill the king. Gyges then became the king of Lydia and with this power of being the king and with the gift of invisibility, he took out his wrath on everyone he loathed all those many years.

The point Socrates was making was that in the heart of the human soul is evil. We say power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Socrates is saying – that is not it at all. Power does not cause the soul to be corrupted; the soul is already corrupted. Power just puts it on display and absolute power displays the evil brilliantly.

Well that clearly is the story that J. R. Tolkien runs with in his *The Lord of the Rings*, and the Dark Lord Sauron's Ring of Power and how very few people can carry it. No one but these two characters, Bilbo and Frodo and carry that ring. They can't carry the ring for long. But most of us think we could endure the ring.

A psychologist, making a comment on *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy said that what this ring is called is "a psychic amplifier". In other words, it takes the part of your life deep within you that might be lying dormant and it exaggerates it, amplifies it, to a point where people can see it. So in *The Lord of the Rings*, if someone is out for justice and puts that ring on his finger, he cannot endure the power and his need for justice becomes an idol of vindication and of revenge. We will get justice at any cost to any one for any reason. This thing called power is a psychic amplifier and it brings out the absolute worst in us. It shows and displays that which is the worst in us.

That is the context of John 13. In verse 3 it says this:

John 13:3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God ...

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power. He also knew that He had come from God and would return to God.

That is the context of what we are going to read about today, that Jesus has all of this power now, at His disposal. All things are underneath His power. He knows that. He is wearing this ring. He knows that in 72 hours, He will be dead. He knows that the people in the room, His faithful followers, will be scattered, and one will even betray Him. So this is what Jesus does when all things are put under His power. Look at verse 1.

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love.

:2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.

:3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under His power, and that He had come from God and was returning to God;

:4 so He got up from the meal, took off His outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around His waist.

:5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him.

That is great detail that John goes into to explain what is taking place.

All things have been placed under the power of Jesus Christ. And what does He want to do with that? He wants to show those people He loves, the extent of His love. How does Jesus show the extent of His love by the use of all things under His power? He takes off His outer garment and wraps a towel around His waist, pours water into a basin, and begins to wash all the feet of the people in that room. That is what Jesus does when all things are put under His power. He says: I want to show you how much I love you and here is how I will do that.

## **God the Omni-Slave**

It is interesting – when we sing songs about God, it is enjoyable to sing about the bigness of God. You want a God bigger than the ever-expanding universe, don't you? By definition, He has to be bigger than the ever-expanding universe. But we want that and need that.

We want Him to be all powerful because He has to be by definition. But we like that in God.

We like that He knows all things because there are so many things that are mystifying to us and beyond our ability to comprehend. Then there is God and we can say: He is doing all that. Don't you worry.

He is ever-present and we are happy that He is always everywhere all the time because then no one is getting away with anything; there are no secret meetings because God is there. We are never alone and we gain courage knowing that God is with us all the time.

Those are called the omni's. Omni is a prefix which means "all" and we like Him being all-powerful, all-big, all-knowing, and all-present.

But that is not what this passage is about. This says that He is all-serving. This says that Jesus is all-humble.

This says that if you take the "onion" of the attributes of God and you start peeling them off. The outside attributes are the bigness and the power. When you start going further and further down toward the core of the onion (which is holiness), you are going to find love. We are so glad that He is all-loving. But then we are going to find that He is all-serving. A layer still deeper than that is He is all-humble. God is all-humble.

It is like God to take off His outer garment and put on a rag around Him to wash the feet of His creation. It is not beneath Him; it is like Him. It comes natural to His nature because that is the way He is. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He now showed them the full extent of His love." He wants everyone to see this attribute of God that they may not have wanted to know about, honestly. You have to see this in God and you have to acknowledge it. But if you can, that you can grasp it that God would make all things through Jesus, before Jesus and by Jesus. Then Jesus steps into that creation, into the container that He made for you and me. He steps into that container. And he does not come as a full grown male, looking quite dapper and strong. He comes as a defenseless baby, born by a very common young girl, in a cave because there is no room for the Maker. His first crib is a food trough for cattle. Why? Because it is the nature of God to serve. God is omni-humble. If you don't understand that attribute about Him, then you can't understand how He could walk on this earth for 33 years as a carpenter – not as

a tycoon or a billionaire or having people waiting on Him – but as one who serves other men who were beneath Him – because everything is.

He finds himself in a kangaroo court accused of things He did not do, tried for the thing He said He was – a king. He was put through an excruciating death so that He might please His Father. What motivates Him? His nature of being humble and of serving. It would be just like God to wash these people's feet. It came easy. He was blessed by doing it and that is hard for us to get.

God loves humility. It is the language that God speaks and that is why people who read the Bible but who are proud, all they get out of it are words. They are only able to accumulate information. They can go to seminary and be pastors or professors or as lay people they just know a lot; but they don't know what it means because the language of the Bible is humility. If it is a foreign language, you cannot understand it because there is so much lost in the translation. It is just the way He is; so, why wouldn't He speak that way. It is so like Him to tie a towel around His waist and wash the dirty feet of these men.

I don't know how certain I am about this but in some of the research, I read that if you were a Jewish slave owner and the person working for you was Jewish, that slave would not do this job. The owner would have a Greek or a Roman doing this job. This job was beneath the lowest slave. As a matter of fact, if you came into employment with someone and you wanted to know if you were the absolute bottom of that totem pole, you are washing feet and you made it.

So you say – *Really? God is servant and He is omni-humble?* – I would say yeah because you cannot make sense out of what He does unless He is a servant. You can't make sense out of the fact that we continually reject Him and He just waits for a response of repentance and He is right there. We actively shake fists at Him as though we have a right to and then when we finally drop our hands and make our way back to Him, He is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son who runs towards us to give us a robe, a ring, and a pair of sandals because He serves us. How else can you make sense of that attribute of His.

We sang earlier that our shame is as deep as the ocean and He goes deeper still. Why does He do that? Because He is a servant – because He is omni-humble. He can stoop lower than our stupid.

A few weeks ago, Jeremiah was teaching out of the passage that says [Luke 12:22-34] – quit worrying so much about what you are going to eat or what you are going to drink. What does Jesus say? *I have got that. Why are you always praying and talking to Me all the time about what you are going to wear? I have got that. Who says: I will take care of what you are going to eat. I will take care of what you will wear. Who says that? Slaves, servants, the maitre d', the waiter.* It is beyond my ability to imagine Jesus with a towel over His forearm; but it is not beyond what is real. That is who Jesus is. His psychic

amplifier, when all things were placed under His power, and He knew where He was from – from heaven – and that He would return to the Father, His psychic amplification went “I want them to know the extent of my love for them and so I will take off my outer clothes and I will wrap a towel around my waist and I will go to my knees and I will scrub the dirt off of my creation – because that is what I do.”

### **John 13:12-17**

Let's look at what Jesus tells us to learn from this.

John 13:12 When He had finished washing their feet, He put on His clothes and returned to His place. “Do you understand that I have done for you? He asked them.

:13 “You call Me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.

:14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

:15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done or you.

:16 I tell you the truth (truly, truly; really, really), no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Look at verse 17 which is a promise.

:17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

The master is better than the slave and look at what the Master did. Now you guys go do this.

### **Two Attributes of Humility**

There are two attributes in this story that describes humility nicely. You won't like them but they are pretty clear.

The first one is that humility turns the world upside down. These are upside down values. As we were going through the book of John and then we went off to the book of Luke, didn't we see Jesus saying in all these many chapters: You guys are getting it wrong. You are keeping score in the absolutely opposite way. If you want to be first, you have to be last. Some of those guys who are last are going to be first. Why is it always climbing up? Why do people always thinking that bigger or more is better? Why are you collecting stuff that is transitional and temporal instead of saving for eternal things? Why don't you invest in the future? Why do you count big, strong, popular people as more important than a little woman who gives the last two cents of her livelihood away? You are getting it wrong. It is like you are living in a shadow of what is real.

Then He comes out and says: This is the way it really is. This is power on display. Watch this. Let Me wash your feet. See, Jesus is just doing what He has been saying all along. – I know where I am from. I know where I am going. And this is the way it works.

He is defining what is real and true, isn't He?

The other attribute of humility is that it is indiscriminate. I don't like that word and what it means. It means that there is no bias, no prejudice, no reason to exclude someone. Who is the someone we want to exclude? Judas. We would all wash Jesus' feet, right? We would line up. We might even get a little argument about who gets to wash Jesus' feet. In my mind, a fantasy would be that when He see Him and I am kneeling before Him, that I could wash His feet with my tears – no doubt.

Would you wash a friend's feet? Sure, probably, especially if these needed it.

That is not what happens in this passage. I think some of us can do that because our humility is dormant but there is still a mild heartbeat.

This humility is Jesus washing the feet of Judas. Jesus knows and Judas knows that the man who will trade Him in for money, just a few chunks of silver, and Jesus is down on His knees in front of him, hoping that maybe something is to be learned here.

### **Application**

Here is how to apply this. Humility is the posture of a Christ follower. If you are *all in*, you look humble. It does not mean you are moping around, thinking badly about yourself. That is not what humility is. Humility is not even thinking about yourself at all; it is forgetting.

Since it is the language that God speaks, then it is the language we can listen to if we are humble.

The question today is: How do you become humble? It would be easy for us to make a list of modern day foot washing. Here is what it looks like today and here is how to do that. It is a very common way to apply this passage because if we made that list and you did it, then you could say – *Humble. I did that in November, 2011.* – It is not *doing* humble – it is *being* humble. If you would be humble, I have to tell you that you are going to find some dirty feet out there to wash. Don't you worry; you will find ways to express your love for another person by washing their feet in some way. You will – it will show up.

So, how do you become humble? Because that is what Jesus was – He was humble. Then this opportunity showed itself.

If you go back to what I am trying to emphasize here as the key to the passage, Jesus was anchored in the knowledge that He had come from God and that He would return to God and that all

things were placed under His power. He was so assured of who He was and where He had been and where He was going that He could do this. He could commit this action because of His understanding.

So, you would have to have faith in the promises of the words of God. The Father had given Jesus these promises and He said: Yes, I have faith that those things are true. So we would have to be that way too. We would have to believe in those promises as they applied to you.

You would have to look at the passages. We did a sermon series (Feb. 2011) “You Are” and we looked how God views us in His holiness after we have been reconciled to Him. If we were to believe that about ourselves, we would have the power to be self-forgetful. One of the zenith points of that series is just this one verse in Romans 5:1:

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ...

What if that one sentence, we bought it hook, line, and sinker? What if we acknowledged it and said: Yes, because of my faith in this promise that I am just before God and there is peace with God through Christ Jesus, I could not be embarrassed or ashamed. I could not be demeaned or laughed at with any consequence to me. I would have so much levity and life that I could push on and look at how it would show up at work. There is no difference in titles or the way we treat people at work because of this knowledge of who I am and who I belong to. I am from God and I will return to God; because of that I can show up at the workplace and be self-forgetful. Wouldn't that be something? That kind of power going into the marketplace or even at home.

If you were not concerned about how other people thought about you or you were so spell-bound by this forgiveness that comes in Christ, then you could raise your children, not in who you want them to become so that they look good for you, which is often the case. You could just serve down on your knees the nature of that child that God made. Wouldn't life be a journey because you would be trying to discover the way God made that boy or girl. Then you would not be torquing it out of his bent but working with God. He would not care what other people thought – whether they showed up to an event or how they did in life. You are keeping score differently, right.

In marriage, what if you brought this abject level of humility into your marriage and then you were keeping count –not of how much you received from your mate but how much you gave. What if you were that person who is a giver no matter what? You were washing the feet of your spouse in the midst of anger or disagreement and you didn't care if you were understood any more because – I am at peace with God because of my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. – You would have to believe in God's promises about what He says is true in you.

The second thing is that you would have to believe in God's promises about what His words say about Him because the Bible says that He hates the proud and He blesses the humble.

Proverbs 3:34 He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble.

What if you believed that to be true about God? If you could have a little Q & A time, you might ask: If I go into this and I wash the feet of people in my life, they are going to take advantage of me. Right? Here is what I would answer: Absolutely, they will famously humiliate you because a lot of people, most people, look at humility as a weakness, not as strength. They look at it as an opportunity to take advantage of. If you roll over and show your throat to a wolf, that wolf will kill you. – It is not like that at all. They will do that and then have a meeting later with their other wolf friends and talk about how easy it was.

The more you study this passage, the more humiliating it becomes for Jesus. Look at what He does for Judas. Yes, He washes Judas' feet fully knowing what is Judas is going to do. But listen, it does not stop there. Later on, the disciples are talking because Jesus says: One of you is going to betray me. They ask: How do we know which it is going to be? Jesus says: The next guy I am about to feed here. How does Jesus get to a point where He is going to be able to turn and feed Judas? The only way it happens is if Judas is sitting at a place of notoriety, a place of honor. John is probably on Jesus' left and somebody else has to be on His right. Jesus says: Watch this. I am going to dip this morsel here and put some seasoning on it and I will turn and give it to the person who is going to betray Me. – Judas was sitting at a place of honor. Then Jesus gives him this piece of bread, which is an expression of intimacy and closeness. Even in our own social circles, if I were hand this to you – I made this just for you – and all that serving and humiliation and stooping did nothing for Judas. It did not change him a bit. So, yeah, people will take advantage of you – absolutely – but listen, it changed everyone else in the room. When Peter would write an epistle later on as a witness to this event, he would say: Look, this is how churches work. Leaders – humility; young people – humility; you have to be humble. Peter was changed by this. Everyone in the room was changed but Judas.

You would have to believe what Jesus says about His own words. Look at what it says in verse 17 again.

John 13:17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

No kidding – if you just try it, and see what happens.

Jim Collins is a guru from management and he wrote a book entitled “Good to Great.” What was interesting in his having studied many men and women in charge of companies that made it big from some bad times and they made it big for a long period of time because these men and women came in and changed the culture of the companies. What he found was that while they had various differences in

personalities and temperaments and styles and skills, one thing, he said, was a common thread. He called it Level 5 leadership. There was no other word for Level 5 leadership except the word humility. These CEOs, these men and women, did not have their ego involved in the company. They were extremely humble. They shunned public adulation. And they were never boastful about their accomplishments. I think one of the reasons they did well was because – “You will be blessed if you do them.”

G. K. Chesterton said: Angels fly because they take themselves so lightly.

Do you take yourself lightly? Or would you sink to the bottom of the ocean?

## **Summary**

Let me just summarize.

Humility is called a meta-virtue. That means a virtue that encompasses all the other virtues and excites them.

If you are a humble person, then you will be a wise person because a humble person is always looking to learn. They can learn from their own little children or they can learn from a billboard on the side of the road. They are always curious and looking for ways they can learn and that makes them a wise person because their humility, intellectually, gives them that avenue.

Humble people are joyful people because this virtue of joy finds itself in self-forgetfulness and they are free with their emotions and not looking for ways to avoid embarrassment; they are free. What would you be if you were free? If you were humble, you would be joy-filled.

Humble people see things that other people don't see. All the men in that room and no one saw dirty feet but one man and He was the Son of Man. He was not blinded by pride but free to see. It would come naturally to Him to wash their feet and so He did.

If you find yourself drifting towards this attribute, there will be a day, and it might be after someone kicks you when you are down – I mean somebody kicks you to the curb and stands over you and laughs – but when you get to bed at night, you will know that you were like Christ that day. There is something very deep that says – Wait a minute, where did that come from? Sometimes it is just serving someone and you get no thanks for that. It will happen then too. But there will be a time when you serve someone because you are humble and it was not premeditated but just happens because of who you are and you will say: That is me being human in the image of Jesus the Christ. It would be just like Him to stoop and it would be just like me to do the same. Then you could remember that verse in John 13:17 that says blessed is he who does that.

Before we take communion today, and I want us to take communion in the context of being *all in* - Today here is what *all in* means. It is the pursuit of humility. It is the desire to be a servant. It is to try to grasp this about God and say – if we are made in His image, it must be in there somewhere. So I want us to pray a prayer of the pursuit of emptiness. Join me.

Why don't we just lose our selfish ambition and let God honor us.

God: I ask that You help us lose our addiction to stuff, that we might seek for You to provide us wholeheartedly, that we would lose our obsession with control and just follow You like a child, that we would lose our appetite for thrills and we would be startled by the simple pleasures we find by serving, that we would lose our life so we might gain real life.

Lord, as we come to the communion table, I ask that You would cleanse us from the unrighteousness that is part of our daily experience, that we would take this with a clear conscience, and that we would be remembering that meal You had with those men and all that meal meant.

We pray this in Jesus' name.