

PASSION WEEK

Passages for today: Luke 22:14–16, 24–30; John 13:1–20; Mark 14:27–31; Matthew 26:31–35; Luke 22:31–38; John 13:31–38

A Dispute Over Greatness & A Picture of Humility!

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:14–16)

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. (Luke 22:24).

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 13:3–5)

It is now Thursday evening after sunset and Jesus has gathered His disciples in an upper room of a house that has been prepared for Him. He will share in the Passover meal as His final intimate time with them before heading to the Garden of Gethsemane, praying intensely surrendering to His Father's will, and then being arrested. Jesus has declared once again that He was about to suffer (Luke 24:14-16) and earnestly desired to have this meal with His disciples. You would think at this point in time that the disciples would get it - Jesus was going to die. But they didn't. In fact, we read immediately after Jesus' statement about suffering that a dispute broke out at the meal over who would be regarded as the greatest. Seriously? Were the disciples so shallow and self-centered that all they were thinking about was their own position in Jesus' kingdom and their own greatness? After all Jesus had taught them, even the last time they had a dispute over greatness. But, before you get too judgmental and hard on the disciples, think about your own life. Have you ever had those moments of pure selfishness where you were complaining to God about something He has not given you - right in the midst of prayer. Or maybe you were in a worship service where the Holy Spirit was really moving in people, and through the message, but you sat there hard and cold, feeling distant and distracted. Or maybe you are like the Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14 who went to the Temple to pray and was looking down on the tax collector who prayed out of pure humility and brokenness, thinking that his prayer was mightier and more attractive to God.

Personal arrogance and self-centeredness has a way of bringing a false sense of value and worthwhile at the same time diminishing the work of Christ and the significance of what He has done - for you and for others! Jesus challenged their thinking as He so often did, and gave them insight into His eternal Kingdom. But what He did immediately after this brings even greater conviction when it came to their dispute over greatness. We read in John 13:1-20 that He rose from the table, laid aside His garments, took a towel, and washed the disciples feet. At this point, if it was me, I would be feeling sick to my stomach! How could I be so shallow in focusing on my own "greatness" when Jesus was about to suffer and die on the cross. How could I have even in arrogance raised the question of my own significance in comparison to others when He was now "washing my feet" as an act of pure humility and love. Maybe you have had a "dispute" on the way to church and then felt deep conviction over the worship and message. Or maybe you have been acting in pure arrogance and self-centeredness doing your own thing, and then you get a call from somebody who needs you to pray for them. You feel deep conviction and totally awkward with the thought of praying. Or maybe you have been complaining to Jesus about what He hasn't given you in comparison to others, and then He blesses you. At this point, if you have any sensitivity to the Lord and love for Him, you would be sick to your stomach.

But it goes on from there. After Jesus washed their feet He said to them, "*Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, **blessed are you if you do them.***" (John 13:13-17) Instead of disputing over greatness, as followers of Jesus, we are to show humility and serve one another, even by taking on the posture of the lowest household servant and wash each other's feet! That's what Jesus just said! Then He reveals to them what will happen when He is arrested (Mark 14:27–31; Matthew 26:31–35; Luke 22:31–38; John 13:31–38). They will all reject Him and run for cover out of fear! Even Peter, the most outspoken who refused to accept these words from Jesus. Despite his strong assurance of standing with Jesus to the end, Peter would deny Him! There was no longer any value to disputing personal greatness and worth.

So what happened to the dispute over greatness? Jesus made it clear once again that if they wanted to be truly great, they needed to serve. And not only serve but wash one another's feet. And even if they were still thinking they're great they would soon come to terms with their own denial of Christ as they fled the scene of His arrest. Thankfully, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, they all went on to be great servants in the Kingdom of God who gave of themselves out of humility and love for our Savior. We can learn much from this last week of Jesus' ministry before He suffered and died on the cross. In those moments when we are tempting to elevate ourselves above another, even spiritually, we need to remember Jesus' example of humility and love, and His words regarding greatness - the greatest in the Kingdom are those who put on the towel and serve!