

Believe it or Not, Jesus Knows What He's Doing

By Mark Archibald

John 13:1-17; Matthew 20:20-28

Sunday, February 17, 2019

There's much we can get from this passage. These are Jesus' last moments with the 12 disciples together. He is serving them. He is teaching them incredible truth about leadership – leaders MUST serve! We MUST serve one another! Jesus is teaching very vital stuff. He is present – fully present - with his disciples.

When we look closer, it's interesting to see who is in the room when Jesus does this selfless act. Who are these important people that he gives this teaching and example to?

This scene takes place with Jesus' disciples. On closer look, we see some polar opposites. We see Peter, who we know that best of all of the disciples. We know Peter is:

- **Committed.** He's the first to step forward. He's the first to speak highly of Jesus. He's the first to act. Of all of the disciples, we have no question that he is the most invested.
- **Brash . . .** He's argumentative, abrasive. He's the one to put his foot in his mouth. He's the one that cuts off someone's ear in defense of Jesus. He acts first and thinks later. We can relate!
- **. . . but sincere.** He's remorseful when he messes up. He's doing his best!
- **Leader.** In the end he is the one entrusted by Jesus to lead the church. He is very rough, but a clear leader.

On the other side of the spectrum we have Judas Iscariot.

- **Betrayer.** We see Judas and we see a villain, a betrayer, an evil person. But there's more to Judas than just being a bad dude.
- **Confused.** There is no shortage of conflict in his decision to betray Jesus and turn him over to the authorities. Confusion and remorse, unable to return to the grace of Jesus, ending his life.
- **Complicated.** It's not clear what reasoning is behind Judas' decision to turn against Jesus. This passage says "the devil prompted Judas". Even with this in mind people turn themselves inside out trying to figure out Judas' motivation.
- **Trusted.** Judas was the treasurer for Jesus and his disciples. This kind of a position only comes with trust. Peter can lead, sure, but you don't see Jesus and the disciples entrusting their money to Peter.
- **Positive characteristics seen by others.** People saw something in Judas that made him trustworthy in their minds. Even though he was untrustworthy in the end, he had things about him that made people think highly of him.

So with the 12 disciples we have this very wide spectrum of people – committed Peter on the one end and deceptive Judas on the other. All of these have their feet washed by Jesus at this holy occasion.

But we're only scratching the surface. **It's complex enough that both Peter and Judas are in the Upper Room with Jesus** . . . what of the other disciples? There's 12 guys listed – we barely speak of half of them. We barely know anything about half of them! Let's look at a couple more, giving us an idea of who these people were who had their feet washed by Jesus.

Matthew the tax collector.

When Jesus meets him his reputation is pretty low:

- Matthew made a living **Exploiting his own people**. Tax collectors collected money from their own people and gave it to Rome. Rome was bad! Rome was occupying the region. Israel was under their thumb. And Matthew was a Jew working on behalf of the enemy. Not only was he serving the hated Romans, he was taking advantage of his own people. As long as Rome got their cut, they did not care what the tax collectors charged people. He could charge them as much as he wanted. His bad reputation was well earned.
- **Running with a bad crowd**. When you work in an industry that makes you repulsive amongst your own people, you're not too picky when it comes to your friends. You take what you can get! Matthew was buddies with other tax collectors, prostitutes and what the religious people called "sinners".

Nothing about Matthew is highly regarded or respected. Yet Jesus chooses him to follow him. Matthew gladly leaves his work behind, but insists that all of his friends know and meet Jesus.

Matthew leaves EVERYTHING to follow Jesus!

But what of Matthew's personality comes with him? What parts of him that made 1st century tax collection an appealing job come with him as he follows Jesus? What parts of him that is prone to cheat and steal comes along as he follows Jesus?

My guess? All of it. Matthew's whole person follows after Jesus.

We know lots about Matthew. He's one of the few disciples we know much about. So why talk about him?

Matthew's inclusion is pretty crazy when we consider that he's in the same band of 12 disciples as Simon the Zealot.

Simon the Zealot. Nothing about this guy sounds low key. There could be a number of reasons for this name. Again, none of the reasons are low key.

- Simon could have been a **Zealous nationalist**. Living in a Roman occupied country, he could have been all about the liberation of Israel from Rome. If there was Facebook in Jesus' day, I can't imagine reading this guy's feed! His political positions were probably clear, direct, intense and abrasive.
- **"Zealot" may describe temperament**. Even if he's not in any official role seeking to overthrow the Romans, just being a person described as "zealot" sounds intense. Sounds like a difficult dude to carry on a simple conversation with.

- **“Zealot” was used to describe religiously motivated revolutionaries involved in Guerilla warfare.** This description of revolutionaries prone to violence comes up well after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. But it’s not long after. It’s close enough that the term “zealot” carries with it significant weight. It’s close enough that you could associate zealots as being people prone to violence.

How well do you think Matthew the tax collector and Simon the zealot got along?

Even if “zealot” and “tax collector” describe their lives before following Jesus, these are unlikely friends. They are likely enemies. Even if “zealot” and “tax collector” describe previous lives, their friendships and associations could not be more different. Someone willing to betray their own nation is following Jesus with someone for whom nation is everything.

What was Jesus thinking when he brought these disciples together?

The last one we’ll look at is Phillip.

- **Previously disciple of John the Baptist.** He was already well versed in following a religious leader prior to following Jesus. Phillip is well versed in this life. He’s been to “Bible college”. He’s looking to give his life to God in vocation and lifestyle.
- **Gets what the Messiah is supposed to be.** Philip seems to have good insights into why Jesus does what he does, and how it relates to the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures about the coming Messiah.
- **Also: Does not seem to totally get it.** In the few insights that Philip speaks about Jesus, he seems to be off the mark. He’s often the one to raise concerns or not understand something in the Gospels.

These are just a few of Jesus’ disciples. They are very indicative of who Jesus selected. From what we know the disciples are:

- **Chosen specifically by Jesus.** It’s just like Jesus to choose unlikely people. It’s just like Jesus to notice and pick those who have been passed over by others. It’s just like Jesus to choose the underdog. These are specifically, carefully chosen by Jesus.
- **Committed.** They give three years of their lives to follow Jesus. 3 years!!! And then a whole lot more. For all of their obvious and glaring failings, these guys stick with it.
- **NOT THAT GREAT!!** Nothing seems impressive about them. The Gospel writers write about many moments of infighting and bickering. There’s lots of pettiness to go around. And when Jesus is betrayed and arrested, they scatter and run away. They’re petty. They’re awful.

They’re just so darn relatable.

If we were to walk in the upper room where Jesus is washing the disciples’ feet, we probably wouldn’t be saying, “Well that’s a mighty keen! What a lovely group of Christians!” We would look around the

room asking, “What’s that guy doing here? And what’s that guy doing here? Don’t even get me started on this guy!” Based on who he has chosen and associated himself with, we may be questioning the credibility of Jesus. But Jesus knows what he is doing.

Jesus is fully aware. He knows who he chose. He screened carefully who his 12 disciples were going to be.

He’s been at this with them for three years. He could have made some cuts; signed some free agents. But these are the people he chose back then, and these are the people he is choosing right now. Jesus is fully aware of who is in the room with him at this moment.

He is aware of the significance of this moment. *Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. (v. 1)* This is who he wants with him right now. These are the very feet he wants to wash and is going to wash.

Jesus is fully in control. As the writer of John describes this moment, he goes out of his way to describe that Jesus is fully in control here. The entire book is written like this – Jesus is in control of what goes on around him, of the timing of things, in control of everything involved his life, ministry and death.

Jesus is in control of the dynamics involving his relationships with these disciples. *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (v. 2)* It is important that what happens, happens now.

Jesus is fully connected. Jesus loves these flawed, faulty, messy disciples to the very end. *Unless I wash you, you have no part with me. (v. 8)* Even though Judas will betray him shortly, even though they will deny knowing him and run away as he is arrested, even though they will hide in fear, he gives himself fully to them.

Jesus is fully aware, in control, connected. He is doing exactly what he is supposed to be doing with exactly who he is doing it with. He serves these people with all the love he can give to them.

What can we learn from this?

We need to give each other a break!

Now more than ever we find reasons to cut ourselves off from one another. We disassociate so quickly. We don’t just cut each other off for doing the wrong thing, we cut each other off for thinking the wrong thing. Jesus doesn’t seem to do that. He brings the most unlikely people together intentionally to follow after him.

We need to extend grace. Jesus washes all of the disciples’ feet. We would go into that room, and every one of us would have reasons of who is in and who is out as Jesus’ true disciples. Jesus brings all of them together and washes their feet. He’s not ashamed to be associated with them.

Rather than continuing patterns of division and isolation Jesus says, I have given you an example to do likewise.

Give other people a break, especially those who follow Jesus, too. They are who they are. What if we took the approach of Jesus and just served them as they are? As you serve them and know them they will surprise you. Not with how dumpy and dopey they are. They will surprise you with how Jesus is at work in them.

We need to give ourselves a break!

Some of us have a hard time knowing God loves us. And even for those of us who know God loves us. We believe this about the love of God: God loves us because he has to.

We believe that God doesn't love us because he wants to. God loves us because he is compelled to because of his character. So that's the lie we live with. An image of a God that loves, but under his breath mutters how rotten and miserable and undeserving we are.

That's not the love of God.

The love of God is Jesus being intentionally with these disciples, who none of us in our right minds would choose, and serving them and washing their feet.

In washing their feet Jesus declares: You. Belong. To me.

These are the words that Jesus has for us as his followers.

You.

Belong.

To me.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (v. 2)

Jesus chooses every one of his disciples. Jesus serves them all. Jesus teaches them to serve.

Jesus chooses to be with us. Jesus serves us. Jesus invites us to serve.

Believe it or not, Jesus knows what he is doing.