

JOHN 13-17

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# REVEALING JESUS



9 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR  
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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MATT OLLIFFE

*Revealing Jesus*

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 875245 79 6

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

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## » HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

### 1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

## 2. The format

The studies contain five main components:

- sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- numbered questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- sidebars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- ‘Implications’ sections that help you think about what the passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

## 3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the sidebars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but also respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learned.

## 4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part. If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

## 5. Bible translation

We quote from and refer to the English Standard Version, which we recommend. There should not generally be any problems, however, if you are using a different translation. (Nevertheless, it might be useful to have an ESV on hand in case of any confusion.)





## » STUDY 1

# SERVANT AND BETRAYER REVEALED

[JOHN 13:1-35]

### One night only

THROUGHOUT THE FIRST TWELVE chapters of John's biography of Jesus, we are provided with a record of signs and discourses from across the three years of Jesus' earthly ministry. John handpicks these moments to explain who Jesus is and what he came to do, introducing the reader to Jesus as God the Son, while also highlighting various challenges to Jesus and his authority.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, chapters 13-17 give an account of Jesus' acts and words on *one night only*. And this is not just any night; it is the night before Jesus dies.

Consider what this means for the chapters we are about to study: three years' worth of words and deeds spread across twelve chapters, followed by no fewer than five chapters being devoted to a single night.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the events and

teachings of this night were burned into John's mind as being of extraordinary importance.

Unlike the other three Gospel writers, John records at length the conversation Jesus had with his disciples following their final Passover meal together. John records neither the events of the meal itself nor Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane; his focus lies on this conversation, particularly on Jesus' teaching. After his betrayal is set in train (13:1-35), four named disciples (Simon Peter, Thomas, Philip, and Judas [not Iscariot]) make requests of Jesus or ask him bewildered questions, to which he provides responses (13:36 to the end of chapter 14). They then walk together from the upper room, across the Kidron Valley, to the place where Jesus will be



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4. How does Simon Peter react to both Jesus' act of **foot washing** and Jesus' correction (vv. 6–9)?

5. In what way are the disciples already "clean" (vv. 10–11; cf. 15:3; 1 John 1:7, 9)?

6. What does Jesus promise his disciples (v. 17)?

### **Foot washing**

Jesus interrupted the meal, which followed a well-known pattern, to wash his disciples' feet. Strictly speaking, the foot washing was unnecessary—for they had already eaten most of the Passover meal with their feet uncleaned. Jesus removed his outer garment in their view and was most likely bare chested as he washed their feet, probably placing their feet in his lap on the towel. This was a highly unusual act, especially for a teacher. In Jewish thinking, a student might wash a teacher's feet, but a teacher washing the feet of his pupils was highly irregular, to say the least.

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## The servant and his example

JESUS' FOOT WASHING ON THE NIGHT before he died—an enacted parable—explains who Jesus is and what he will achieve in his death. Jesus is the suffering servant: he will be pierced for his sheep's transgressions as a lamb to the slaughter, and by being lifted up he will 'sprinkle' (or cleanse) many; afterwards, he will rise (Isa 52:13-53:11; John 10:11). Jesus is going away via the cross to serve his disciples; the actions John records at the Last Supper point to this.

Jesus' ultimate motivation is love—his thoroughgoing and steadfast commitment to the good of his disciples. Jesus' love "to the end" (13:1) stands as a heading over everything that follows and points to Jesus' imminent completion of the mission his Father gave him. So the first message Jesus conveys by the foot washing is all about himself: he loves his disciples, and that is why he is going to die. Jesus' knowledge of his identity and mission frees him to serve others.

Given the cultural context, Peter's

discomfort is understandable. Yet he must be gently rebuked, because to be saved by Jesus, we must first be served by Jesus (13:8). Disciples are cleansed by Jesus when they believe his word (cf. John 15:3).

But the loving service must not stop with the recipients. What Jesus has done is an *example*—the embodiment of the principle of service that governs the disciples as they follow Jesus. The servant heart of the master must live in the disciples also, who must 'pay it forward'. And they are promised blessing when they do so—not a crude *quid pro quo* or the cosmic karma of the prosperity gospel—but because in the world created by an other-person-centred triune God, it is more blessed to give than receive (Acts 20:35).

So the time has come for Jesus to be glorified, but 'the devil is in the detail' (John 13:2). Not every man having his feet washed at the table returns Jesus' love.

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### Read John 13:18–35.

7. Despite the heightened distress of this situation (v. 21), what were Jesus' primary concerns (vv. 18–20, 31–32, 34–35)?

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**8.** What does this passage show us about:

- the plans of Judas (vv. 18, 26-27, 30)?
- the work of Satan (vv. 2, 27)?
- the purposes of God (vv. 18-19, 26-27, 31-32)?

**9.** Read Acts 2:23. How does this help us to understand the tension between human responsibility (embodied by Judas) and God's control over these events?

**10.** What's so new about the "new commandment" (vv. 34-35)? Why is it important (cf. vv. 14-17; 1 John 3:11-24)?

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## The disciple whom Jesus loved

This almost certainly refers to John Zebedee, the author of the Gospel, using a modest form of self-reference (cf. 19:26-27, 20:2-8, 21:20-25). John's experience of Jesus' love towards him was so transforming and identity-altering that his understanding of himself is now determined by that love (cf. 1 John 3:1). Jesus' command to "love one another" also made a deep impression on him, as any reader of John's first letter can testify. Church history reports that John lived on in Ephesus into extreme old age; he would be carried to church to say nothing but, "Little children, love one another". His disciples asked, "Teacher, why do you always say this?" He replied, "Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient".<sup>3</sup>

## The devil entering Judas

The thought of the devil in some sense entering Judas is horrible. John's description suggests a comprehensive takeover. We must confess an element of mystery here: the time marker "And it was night" (v. 30; cf. 2:23-3:2) emphasizes that Satan is now on centre stage, but this is all according to God's ►

## The betrayer revealed

IN THE UPPER ROOM, only Jesus apprehended the horror of the next 24 hours. Jesus is disturbed about his imminent betrayal and death, but he has his disciples to think about.

Unsurprisingly, it is Peter—the leader and impulsive man of action—who seeks out the identity of the betrayer. Jesus' revelation of the traitor reads like an eyewitness account. Noteworthy are John's humble yet grateful self-designation as **the disciple "whom Jesus loved"**, and his confident invasion of the personal space of the Word incarnate.

In his treatment of Judas, despite his distress, Jesus speaks with self-composure and reserve, also demonstrating his control over the situation. He divides his disciples between the chosen eleven and the one who will 'lift his heel' against him (verse 18, quoting Psalm 41:9). Of course, Jesus chose all the twelve (John 6:70), but he chose Judas with full knowledge of his ultimate treachery. What is about to transpire was prophesied, predestined, and planned not ultimately by **the devil who entered Judas**, nor by Judas himself, but by God his Father, as shown by the predictions of Scripture. Jesus' own prediction of Judas' betrayal will confirm him to the eleven as the "I am", God himself (13:19; cf. 8:58; Exod 3:14).

Jesus also confirms the eleven as his envoys and ambassadors. In due course, they will be invested with his authority and power, despite the fact that one of their number is a betrayer. And even as Jesus reveals the betrayer, Judas is not 'named and shamed'; the other disciples have no idea why Judas has left the room.

Jesus then makes four statements (John 13:31-32) about his glorification that will occur over the next 72 hours: "Now is the Son of Man glorified" (referring to him being 'lifted up' on the cross); "God is glorified in him" (because Jesus' obedience glorifies the Father); "God [the Father] will also glorify him [the Son] in himself" (likewise the Father glorifies the Son); and God the Father will "glorify him at once" (referring to the

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glorification of Jesus' resurrection on the third day). Jesus will be thus vindicated before the world (cf. 16:8-11).

So Jesus has a 'new' commandment for his disciples to direct their conduct in his absence: "just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (13:34). The newness of Jesus' command lies in "as I have loved you". Jesus redefines the old commandment (Lev 19:18; Matt 5:43, 19:19, 22:39) according to the love that he is in the process of demonstrating—"having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Every discussion of Christian love thereafter is informed by Jesus being the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

The example of Jesus' suffering adds a new measure of the extent of this love: the command is to love other disciples to the extent that Jesus loved us. The foot washing in the upper room is an application of what Jesus' disciples must give themselves to in the ordinary course of everyday life. This command has a special focus on the love that we owe fellow Christians (cf. 1 Tim 5:10; Matt 25:40; Gal 6:10). The chief mark of the Christian is love for other believers. And with the command comes an invitation to the world: all people are invited to judge whether confessing disciples really are followers of Jesus based on their love for one another (John 13:35).

plan, and God has clearly handed Judas over to Satan. Jesus later will say that he kept and guarded the eleven and lost none except "the son of destruction" (17:12). If Jesus had similarly guarded Judas, he too would have not perished—but then the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled. Ultimately, Jesus is in control of his own betrayal. The situation of Judas is thus unique, and we can avoid sharing his tragic end simply by 'believing in the Son'—something that Judas sadly refused to do. After Pentecost, every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and neither the devil nor any demon can take control of us in this way.

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## » Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss in your group.)

- Do you agree that you need to be washed by Jesus? Why or why not? In what way does Jesus need to wash you?



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- In what practical ways can you follow Jesus' example of love? How can you "wash the disciples' feet" in your situation?
  
  - How have you been blessed in your own service of others? Share some examples.
  
  - Think about the yardstick that Jesus gives "all people" to judge whether we are his disciples. How do you stack up?

## » Give thanks and pray

- Thank Jesus for his love for his disciples "to the end".
- Ask God for wisdom to know how to love one another, and strength to carry it out.

### Endnotes

1. See my studies on John 1-4, *Introducing Jesus*, and John 5-12, *Challenging Jesus*, both published by Matthias Media.
2. In fact, the events of this night stretch into chapter 18 (which will be covered in a forthcoming series of studies on John 18-21, God willing).
3. Jerome, *Commentary on Galatians*, book 3, on 6:10, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 121, trans. Andrew Cain, Catholic University of America Press, Washington, DC, 2010, p. 260.