

John 13:1-5 – “Exaltation & Humiliation”

(Pew Bible Page: 900)

Intro: Scripture assures us that *“pride leads to a fall,”* and perhaps this was never more apparent than in the last few years of Richard Nixon’s presidency. Hubris, overweening pride, led to the downfall of a man who many think might have been remembered as a skillful and helpful chief executive who did much good for his nation, had he not been tripped up by his own desire for self-protection. Pride leads to disaster inevitably. Remember the great question of those days? “What did the president know, and when did he know it?” That was exactly the right question, wasn’t it? The president *knew*, and what he knew led him to cover up what he *did*. What we know ultimately determines what we do. That’s the way human beings are programmed, and as we’ll see in tonight’s lesson, Jesus in His humanity functioned under that same dictum. What He knew led to what He did, but as we’ll see in tonight’s study, unlike most of us, the exaltation Jesus knew he possessed, led Him to the voluntary humiliation of servanthood.

Proposition: Because Jesus knew His exaltation, He offered Himself in humble servanthood.

Just two themes in the text tonight will form the basis of our study: (vv.1-3) Jesus Knew His Exaltation; (vv.4-5) Jesus Embraced His Humiliation.

(vv.1-3) Jesus Knew His Exaltation – Working our way through this text which forms the beginning of Jesus’ last discourse, we discover a fascinating list of things Jesus knew about Himself. Much about Jesus’ inner life is shrouded from our sight. We wonder how the perfect union of Deity and Humanity functioned in His mind and heart, and in the verses before us tonight we have a glimpse of Jesus’ self-image. Who did He understand Himself to be? We are told certain things:

- He knew that He had come to fulfill the symbolism of the Old Testament. This is hinted at by our being told that these events occurred *“before the Feast of Passover.”* Jesus fulfills the symbolism of each of the Old Testament feasts in His two comings. In His first coming He fulfilled Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost. In His next coming He will fulfill Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles.
- He knew that He had come for an appointed hour and an appointed task. *“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.”* Jesus was in no doubt as to how His story would come to its culmination: death, burial and resurrection would glorify Him (cf. John 13:31-32). His glory was to finish the work His Father had given Him to accomplish.
- He knew that He loved His disciples, and He knew that one of them would betray Him. *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him.”* When it said that, *“He loved them to the end,”* it means that He loved them and us to the fullest extent possible – that His love for them had no limits, and this in spite of the fact that one of them, Judas Iscariot, had already hatched the plan to betray Him, and beyond that He knew very well that all the others would abandon Him and that Peter would even go so far as to deny Him, nevertheless, *“He loved them to*

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the end.” “Judas was an unbeliever (John 6:64-71), so he did not have a ‘shield of faith’ to us to ward off Satan’s attacks.”¹ But what can we say about the others? Simply that Jesus loves His disciples because it is His nature to love, never because of our performance.

- Jesus knew that everything depended on Him. **John 13:3 - 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.* His Father had sent Him to do the work of redemption and had now put everything into His Son’s hands. It all depended on Jesus. If He failed, the whole plan of redemption the Father had announced in eternity before the world was made would fall to the ground. But Jesus knew that He would not fail, because we are told that He knew, “*that he had come from God and was going back to God.*”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus knew who He was, He knew why He came, He knew what He was facing, and He knew where He was going. He also knew whom He loved.

(vv.4-5) Jesus Embraced His Humiliation – There is a precious picture here of the Lord of Glory laying aside His divine prerogatives and taking up the tools of servanthood. Knowing His exaltation as described in verses 1-3, He then **John 13:4–5 - 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.* I don’t know that I would take a bullet for this, but it seems to me that when He rose from supper and laid aside his outer garment, there is at least a hint of His laying aside the prerogatives of deity – rising from His throne of Glory and setting aside His robes of glory – and taking up the garments of humanity and the humiliation of the cattle trough. When Jesus came to earth He emptied Himself, we are told, and took up the tools of a servant: the water, the basin, the towel. How surprising Jesus’ actions must have been to His disciples! Earlier that evening they had been arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest. When Jesus embraced the role of a servant and began to wash their filthy feet, how small they must have felt. None of them had humbled himself to provide that neglected service of foot washing that night. Now their Master was on His knees, washing and drying their feet. What humility! He was doing the lowliest work of servanthood. Here is a picture of what Jesus would accomplish for them the next day on the cross. Having been given a group of sweaty, dirty, smelly followers – one of whom would sell Him out for the price of a slave – and I’m not just speaking of the twelve men in that room – I’m talking about you and me! He humbled Himself and washed away our sins.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Counterintuitively, what Jesus knew of His exaltation led Him to the voluntary humiliation of servanthood.

This is not the way things happen among men on planet earth! The Apostle Paul gave us the normal run of things when he observed that “*knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up.*” Among

¹ Wiersbe, Warren. Page 345.

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(Pew Bible Page: 900)

men, knowledge provokes pride. But this is not so with God! With God, it works backwards from the way it works with men. Acknowledging His exaltation, He accepts voluntary humiliation and stoops to save mere specks of dust on the surface of a grain of sand in His universe. What is the explanation for this? It's given to us in verse one: *“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”* The only explanation for this is love. **1 John 4:19** tells us that, **19** *We love because he first loved us.* Jesus did not lay aside His glory and humble Himself because we smelled good, or were smart, or were righteous, or could give Him anything and were essential to His plans, for we are none of those things. He humbled Himself because He loves us. Just that; nothing else.

What are we to do with all of this? I can think of five observations that may help us apply tonight's lesson:

1. Jesus is the Father's love incarnate. We are called to be Jesus' love incarnate in our generation. How will our world recognize God's love unless they see it in us?
2. Like our Lord, we have been sent here for a specific purpose in a specific generation. We are not in Sebring at this point in history by accident. God has sent us to this place at this time to make His love known to this generation. “The only place you can effectively serve God is the place where He has put you.”
3. Judas betrayed Jesus because his heart had no shield of faith to deflect Satan's arrows of deceit. Though we may be genuine believers, you and I can be tripped up by the evil one if we do not take seriously the call to fill our hearts and minds with God's truth as Jesus did.
4. Do we know who we are, why we're here and where we are going? Remember the Cheshire Cat's famous words to Alice: “If you don't know where you're going, any road will do!” What are you aiming at as you live your life? I hope we're not just marking time until we arrive home in heaven!
5. Does what we know of ourselves in Christ lead us to servanthood among our brothers? If so, the Spirit's work of forming Christ within us is well under way.

Conclusion: Have you ever wondered how things might have turned out for President Nixon if he had just humbled himself and confessed, “I messed up”? In the less toxic than today atmosphere of those days it's entirely possible that he might have been able to weather the storm. But he didn't do that and the result was disgrace. Pride, self-exaltation among men, always produces that result, either in this world or in the next. Isn't it interesting that Jesus' exaltation led Him to voluntary humiliation for our sake? That's what love does. Let's join Him in that great reversal of this world's values.