

I Am the Teacher

M.W. Bassford

5-12-07

Introduction.

- A. From the very beginning, human beings have an astonishing ability to learn. Even before we are born, we learn to do things like recognize voices and appreciate music. Of course, once we emerge from the womb, our rate of learning only accelerates. Everything from crawling to calculus is within the reach of our minds.
- B. Some of this learning we come to by ourselves, but in most areas, learning requires instruction. We learn from TV, we learn from books, but most of all, we learn from other people. All of us who have completed our formal schooling can look back and remember our teachers, some fondly, some not. For those of us who were loud, disruptive children like I was, our teachers can look back and remember us, although probably not fondly. Besides our schoolteachers, though, our families and our friends also add to our learning.
- C. The scope of this education is much larger than we realize. It embraces not only our mental selves, but also our moral selves. Just like no baby is born with an instinctive understanding of trigonometry, so too no one is born with an instinctive grasp of right and wrong. Each one of us possesses a latent moral sense, but instruction in evil can warp and twist it just as instruction in good can shape it into what God desires.
- D. In this all-important realm of the spirit, all the teachers we've already mentioned do their part to mold us. However, no mere man has within himself the fullness of the moral understanding we need to guide us. Only God possesses that, and only God, in the person of Jesus, is both willing and able to instruct us. To see how Jesus meets our needs, let's look at His claim in John 13, where He says, "I am the Teacher."

I. The Source of Service.

- A. The first thing that Jesus teaches us about in this context is what the source of our service needs to be. This appears in John 13:1-5. Here, we see what Jesus does for His disciples in this text—He washes their feet. As we've noted before, this was a menial task, one often associated with the lowliest slaves of the household. It was certainly not something that the religious leaders of Jesus' day ever did. In fact, in Luke 7, Jesus rebukes his host, a Pharisee named Simon, because he didn't even give Jesus any water to wash His own feet in.
- B. So, then, why does Jesus do something that none of the other spiritual teachers of His day would even think of doing? To begin with, John observes in John 13:1 that Jesus loved His disciples to the end. In other words, Jesus loves His disciples so much that within a few days, He is going to sacrifice Himself on the cross for their sins, and if Jesus loves His disciples enough to die for them, He certainly loves them enough to wash their feet.
- C. Beyond that, though, Jesus possesses an understanding of who He is, and what His position in life is, that enables Him to serve. John 13:3 describes what Jesus is thinking about as He prepares to wash the feet of His disciples. He's thinking about how He came from, has received all things from, and is going back to God.
- D. This might seem strange to us. After all, when we start thinking about what great stuff we are, it normally makes us want to puff ourselves up even more, not going around doing lowly, humble tasks for people. Not so with Jesus at this time. Instead of creating pride within Him, these thoughts create security. He knows that He can go shovel manure in the backyard if He wants, and it still won't make Him any less the Son of God.
- E. Paul tells us how we can do this in the midst of his prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:17-19. Once we have been rooted and grounded in love, he says, two things can happen to us. First, we comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. Now, this might not make immediate sense to us, but when we look at the context of Ephesians, we get a better picture of what Paul is saying.
- F. Here's the thing: the way Ephesians is structured, Paul begins a prayer in Ephesians 1:16. In the middle of this prayer, though, from Ephesians 1:19 all the way through Ephesians 3:15, Paul gives us a parenthetical explanation of what he's praying for. Then, in Ephesians 3:16, he returns to the same prayer he was praying earlier. All of this means that even though Ephesians 1:18 and Ephesians 3:18 are two chapters apart, they're actually part of the same immediate context. If we want to know what the breadth and length and height and depth are, we can use that context to figure things out. What Ephesians 1:18 tells us is that Paul is praying that the Ephesians will understand their spiritual blessings in Christ. Ephesians 3, then, is Paul's prayer that they will understand the EXTENT of those spiritual blessings, how deeply blessed they are.
- G. See how this understanding helps make us willing to serve? This world is full of people who only look out for themselves because they believe that if they don't, no one else is going to be looking out for them. As Christians, we don't have to live that way. We're the adopted children of God. There isn't anybody else on the planet who has the status we do. So what if we're doing something lowly? So what if somebody else tries to put us down? There's nothing in this world or outside it that can take us away from God, or Him from us.
- H. Paul also addresses the love that leads to service in Ephesians 3:19. He calls us to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Now, this might also be a little confusing at first. After all, how are we supposed to know something that's unknowable? Paul's point, though, is about the kind of knowledge of love that we're

supposed to have. The love of Christ is a strange thing. We can read the whole Bible through 50 times a year. We can have it memorized if we want, but if we don't act on what we've read, the love of Christ will never make a bit of sense to us. Instead, the love of Jesus is something that we have to know through experience. Only as we try to live for others like He did do we get a glimpse of what His love is like.

- I. We see Paul describe the result of this attitude in Ephesians 4:1-2. When we compare this to what Jesus did in John 13, it should look awfully familiar. What Paul is telling us in context, then, is that our ability and our motivation to walk as servants come from our understanding and our love, just like it did for Jesus.

II. Learning to Be Served.

- A. The next stage of Jesus teaching one of the most important lessons of His ministry comes when He teaches Peter about learning to be served. This incident takes place in John 13:6-8. Peter here is reacting in a completely understandable way. After all, just like anyone of his time would have, Peter thinks that washing somebody else's feet is disgraceful. For him to have the man he knows is the Son of God washing His feet would be nearly blasphemous. Jesus' reply, though, is quite striking. If Peter doesn't allow Jesus to wash His feet, then Peter can't be a part of Jesus at all. Peter needs to learn to be served.
- B. This is a skill that Peter, and that we as well, need to master. This seems incredibly counterintuitive, that we would have to learn to accept service from another, but it is completely true, and the first person we need to allow to serve us is Jesus Himself. Unless we let Him serve us, we too will have no part in Him. In John 13, Peter thought washing feet was about the lowliest thing imaginable that Jesus could do. That's only because Peter hadn't yet seen the Son of God die the long, agonizing death of a common criminal for the sins of mankind. There was nothing glorious about crucifixion before Jesus. In the Roman Empire, crucifixion was the death for pirates, for rebellious slaves, for robbers, for the lowest of the low, for the people who were such worthless scum that the government thought they were unfit to live. That's the shame that Jesus endured.
- C. More importantly still, that's the shame that Jesus endured for us. Consider the words of Romans 5:5-6. That is the way that He offers to serve us, by taking the death we deserve upon Himself. That's the service we have to allow Jesus to give. This process begins when we are baptized. At that time, we commit ourselves to His service, but He also commits Himself to ours, and we have to allow Him to do His work. For the rest of our lives, we have to give to Him the burden of the sin we have done. We have to carry our guilt to the foot of the cross, and then leave it there. We mustn't bear it ourselves. We have to let Jesus serve us by taking it away.
- D. Second, though, we have to learn to let other Christians serve us, and there's a really important reason why. Consider Paul's words in Philippians 4:17-18. Paul was pleased with the Philippians for contributing to his support, but he wasn't pleased because he cared about the money. Instead, he was glad they had helped because he knew what the spiritual effects of their contribution would be. All Paul got was money. The Philippians received the favor of God because of the spiritual sacrifice they had offered.
- E. We need to learn to see that too. When we allow other Christians to help us, we aren't the winners. They are, because they're doing what is pleasing to God. Let's remember that. The next time some brother or sister offers us help, let's give them the chance. Let's give them the priceless opportunity to do what's right.

III. Learning to Serve.

- A. Finally, though, from our Teacher, we learn to serve. This is what we see in the final portion of the context, in John 13:12-17. Throughout the rest of the story, we have to make the application ourselves, but here Jesus just hands the application to us. First of all, it's obvious that Jesus isn't just talking about the literal washing of feet. Otherwise, He wouldn't have bothered asking the apostles what He had done. They knew the foot-washing part already. What they didn't know yet was that the attitude of service should apply everywhere.
- B. Second, it's interesting that this is one of the very few times in Scripture where Jesus refers to Himself as "Teacher," and arguably the only time He does it to teach a lesson. Throughout the gospels, "Teacher" and "Rabbi" are the most common titles of Jesus, but almost always from the lips of others. Here, though, Jesus specifically calls upon the recognition of His apostles and essentially says, "You claim that you listen to Me. Well, if you're going to listen to Me in anything, you need to listen to Me in this."
- C. Jesus applies this emphasis with good reason. If we were to use two words to describe the life of Jesus on earth, we probably couldn't do better than "love" and "service," and those are precisely the two concepts He's trying to get into the head of His disciples. Throughout His ministry, Jesus has used the common things of the world around Him for illustrations, everything from wheat fields to birds. Now, He's using Himself for an illustration. He's the example, He tells us. Look: the Lord of the universe is acting as the humble servant of His people. If the Son of God would do that, what do us lowly earthlings need to do?
- D. Consider, too, the way He closes His instruction in John 13:17. He says that if we know these things, we are blessed if we do them. There's nothing godly about sitting here, listening to this sermon, and then going home and doing absolutely nothing. Instead, if we truly want to be the disciples of Jesus, here's what we need to do. We need to spend our lives looking for ways to humbly serve others, because that's what Jesus did.

Conclusion. If you want to begin this life of service in imitation of Jesus, start today.