

The Authentic Christian

Following Jesus

John 13:1-17

Introduction

In John Chapter 13, Jesus talks about what an authentic Christian looks like. Over the next few weeks, we will examine what it takes to be an ardent follower of Jesus. We will study primarily from the gospel of Luke, mainly Luke Chapters 8-12, where Jesus describes what it means to follow Him. We'll start with Jesus' foundational call and promise to his followers in John Chapter 13.

Let's read beginning with verse one, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded. Then He came to Simon Peter. And *Peter* said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "**What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.**" Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "**If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.**" Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also *my hands and my head!*" Jesus said to him, "**He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.**" For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "**You are not all clean.**" (John 13:1-11 NKJV)

Jesus knew that His hour had come. He would be betrayed and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He would be unjustly condemned and beaten by his accusers. And finally, He would be crucified on a Roman cross. All of this would happen during the Feast of the Passover. Jesus' final hours would begin as He celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. It would be the last meal He would share with them.

According to Jewish tradition, a household servant would wash the feet of a guest rabbi. If there was no household servant, the one considered the least would perform this task. In this case, it would be the lowest or youngest of the disciples.

But Luke tells us that Jesus' disciples were all trying to avoid this task, so they began to argue which of them was the greatest. Jesus realizes what the disciples are arguing about and, without saying a word, assumes the role of the household slave and washes his disciples' feet (13:4,5).

When he finishes washing their dusty, dirty feet, they are clean, and their dust and grime are now all over him. This really got their attention. To ensure they

understood the lesson he was teaching them, it says, "So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:12-15 NKJV)

At the heart of following Jesus is the call to a lifestyle of washing others' feet. Authentic Christians will humbly serve people who don't deserve to be served. In verse 17, Jesus delivers this incredible promise, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." (John 13:17 NKJV)

"Blessed" (*makarios*) means "truly happy." It describes much more than an emotional feeling; it is a profound awareness of how fortunate you are. Jesus says the way to true happiness is by giving yourself service to and for others! In each of the four gospels, Jesus makes this same statement in slightly different ways.

In Matthew 16:25, he says, "Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:24-26 NKJV)

If you try to save your life, thinking only of yourself, you will, in the end, forfeit true happiness and instead experience emptiness and misery. Jesus says there are only two ways to live your life. You will either be self-serving or self-giving. They are two completely different paths leading to two totally different destinations.

So, which of these two paths are you following?

I. Two Different Paths

One way you can tell is to look at what you focus on. When you think about the key people in your life, the self-serving path focuses on how others treat you. Luke 6:27 says, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask *them* back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend *to those* from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most

High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36 NKJV)

When it comes to time management, the self-serving person focuses on having enough time “for myself” to do what I want to do. The self-giving person values their free time but always has enough time to help others. Ephesians 5:2 says, “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:1-2 NKJV)

When it comes to material things, the self-serving path focuses on getting all it wants and can. The self-giving path values and enjoys things but focuses on using its resources to be a blessing to those suffering or struggling. 1 Timothy 6:17 says, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19 NKJV)

In life’s circumstances, the self-serving path focuses on getting the breaks it deserves. However, the self-giving path is thankful for pleasant circumstances but focuses on what Christ teaches through the circumstances. 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all *men* in all *things*, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved.” (1 Corinthians 10:31-33 NKJV)

As sinful, fallen people, we naturally ask the self-serving questions. If you believe that the self-serving life is the path to true happiness, then you probably think that the self-giving life is the path to disappointment and a waste of time.

But is this really the case? Jesus said no! What say you?

II. Two Different Results

If you spend too much time thinking about yourself and what you want, you’re probably following the self-serving path that never delivers what it promises. Authentic Christians, even though they’re imperfect, embrace the sacrificial self-giving path and can testify that Jesus is right about where it leads.

The self-serving path always, in the end, leads to increasing dissatisfaction and disappointment. Self-serving people may initially experience temporary happiness, but it is fleeting, and they need more next time to get the same lift. The self-serving path always leads to a deepening sense of discontent.

Following Jesus leads to a life of contentment with what you have because following Him makes your life full and meaningful. You often experience a joy from giving to others, and you experience a long-term deepening sense of living the Christ life.

The self-serving path leads to relational failure. Self-serving people don't build close relationships; they neglect them. Following Jesus and living the Christian life always leads to greater relational success. When even one person becomes committed to giving unconditional love, it radically changes the dynamics of the relationship. When two people focus on how to give and serve rather than expecting and demanding, the relationship develops into something that, while not trouble-free, becomes more and more stable and enjoyable as the years go by. Romans 12:10, " Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;"

The self-serving path leads to a sense of slavery and victimization and feeling used. When your happiness depends on people treating you well or having favorable circumstances, you are at the mercy of these external factors that are often beyond your control. That only leads to a growing sense of helplessness, anger, and even fatalism. But the Christlike self-giving path leads to a growing sense of freedom.

When you follow Christ, you feel less and less controlled by your circumstances or how others treat you. It leads to a growing sense of empowerment in the proper sense of the word. The self-serving path leads to a lot of emotional anxiety. If your happiness depends on things you can't control, it leads to a lot of nervousness. But following Christ leads to a growing and stable emotional health.

None of us are ever completely free from dealing with emotional challenges. But, in Christ, we can experience a growing peace and hope as we become more loving, giving, and willing to serve. Lots of secular research bears this out. But you have to be careful that you don't pursue happiness as a goal in itself.

Jesus calls us to turn away from the self-serving life. A life of material happiness is not the goal for the authentic Christian; it's often a by-product of following Jesus. It's by faith we receive God's love into our soul and then, by faith, pass it on to others.

We are to be praise conduits, not praise containers! If we focus on receiving God's love and giving it out to others, happiness will come and find us.

III. Receiving God's love

1 John 4:16 says, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." (1 John 4:16 NKJV)

We must know and rely on the love that God extends to us through his Son, Jesus. You must know that God loves you and rely on his love to pass his love on to others. Jesus demonstrates to the disciples in John 13. In verse 13, Jesus says, "You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I

have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13:13-15 NKJV)

How could Jesus love his disciples like this? It is because verse 3 says, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself." (John 13:3-4 NKJV)

Jesus is the greatest leader of all time. And yet He could rise from supper and wash his disciples' feet. He had no ego to feed and was perfectly content with who he was! And because he knew this, he could do what this foot-washing symbolized—dying on the cross to take the filth of our sins upon himself in an act of sacrificial love.

Since Jesus served us in this way, we now know that God loves us the same way that he loved Jesus. As God's adopted sons and daughters, even though we were sinners, God accepts us because of who we are in Christ. We know we have eternal life and will live forever in God's kingdom even though we deserve to go to hell.

We also know Christ's full authority is with us to protect, guide, and empower us despite our weaknesses. When you let Jesus wash you from your sins through His death, in the power of His resurrection, you receive eternal life! It is the *only* way you can become God's child. It is the *only* way you can become an authentic follower of Jesus.

Day by day, we look to God, who affirms that because of what Jesus did for us, we know who we are, where we are going, and what resources we have in Christ.

Conclusion

You will know when you have chosen to follow Jesus because, by faith, you will want to give God's love to others. 1 John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:7-11 NKJV)

You can't *hoard* God's love for yourself. If you try, it goes stale inside you, and you will wind up returning to the path of the self-serving. You have to trust that God will keep loving you, and you trust this by giving His love away to others. We must do this daily for it to stay fresh in our souls.

We must trust Christ's love and "get up and wash the feet" of those God puts in our path even when we don't feel like it. Trust God's promise and sell out to this as a way of life. It will lead to a confident and satisfying life.