

NCACHURCH Bible Studies
2010

John 13–17

8 Studies

Introduction to the Book

“I like the comparison of John’s Gospel to a pool in which a child may wade and an elephant can swim. It is both simple and profound. It is for the veriest beginner in the faith and for the mature Christian. Its appeal is immediate and never-failing. It is a simple Gospel. The humblest believer can read it and understand it and profit by it.”

Leon Morris

John’s Gospel is a great read. It is both lofty and practical; clear and philosophical; elaborate and punchy. It contains some of the great memory verses in the Christian faith including the famous and most often quoted verse in the Bible John 3:16 – also known as the “soccer verse”. It contains some of the most well-known stories of Jesus and the “I am” statements that so poignantly point to his divinity and power.

In fact, the Gospel starts with a clear statement of Jesus’ divine nature in the very first verse. The elegant poem that is the prologue of the Gospel (John 1:1–18) sets up the story as a whole and prepares readers for who it is they are reading about, why he came to earth and what he came to do.

As you begin to read it, perhaps the first thing you will notice is that it is dramatically different to the other three Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. In John there is no narrative parables, no account of Jesus’ baptism or the calling of the disciples, no account of the transfiguration, no record of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, no report of Jesus casting out a demon, no mention of the temptations of Christ. There are fewer short sayings and more long speeches. Perhaps more intriguing is the fact that a lot of the material in John is not in the other Gospels. In fact all of the material in John 2–4 including story of the wedding party event where Jesus turns water into wine, is only in John.

This is explained by scholars in various ways including (1) John focuses more on Jesus ministry in the south – in Judea and Samaria and (2) John focuses more theologically and seeks to explicitly identify Jesus with God.

The section we are focussing on in these studies is John 13–17, sometimes called the Farewell Discourse.

You will notice immediately that Jesus’ public ministry is over. John tells us nothing more of any words spoke by Jesus to the crowds. These chapters focus on Jesus’ final ministry to his disciples. He teaches them here about service, salvation and the Spirit.

You will also notice as you read these chapters that John avoids any mention of particular places or times. It is possible that he did this to ensure that all future disciples who were to read these words, would read them as though they were there, learning from the Master in his last days.

This is certainly how we should approach these chapters. Be ready to listen to the Master and ready to change the way you think and act in response.

Jesus Washes his Disciples Feet

John 13:1-17 – LEADERS’ NOTES

Introduction

Share about a time when you stepped in something horrible or when you were really messy and desperately needed a shower.

First century hygiene standards were a far cry from today and yet Jesus stooped to wash his disciples’ feet. There seems to be several reasons for this action.

This episode of the foot washing turns in two directions. First, it is symbolic of spiritual cleansing (v.8-10) and second, it serves as a standard of humble service and therefore as a call for Jesus’ disciples to “wash one another’s feet”.

One author says: It foreshadows the cross itself: the voluntary humility of the Lord cleanses his loved ones and gives to them an example of selfless service they must follow.

Analysis

Read John 13:1-17.

What are the three things this passage tells us Jesus “knew”? What do these things tell you about Jesus?

See verse 1, 3, 11. We are starting by setting up Jesus as one who has power and authority so the contrast between this reality and his humility can be seen clearly.

It is surprising that someone like Jesus would take the servant’s role and wash his disciples’ feet. What is more surprising is who gets washed. Why do you think Jesus included Judas in the washing even though he was set to betray him?

Note that there is nothing more menial than the act of footwashing. See John the Baptist’s comment in John 1:27. Consider the nature of grace.

What reason does John give for Jesus washing their feet? Is foot washing what you would expect Jesus to do in order to show such a thing? What might be the bigger picture here?

See verse 1. You might want to consider Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:9

What reasons does Jesus give for the foot washing?

See verse 8 and verse 15

Read the conversation between Peter and Jesus – 13:6-10

What does Jesus see the foot-washing is symbolic of?

What do you think verse 10 means?

Read Jesus’ final comments – 13:14-17

Summarise Jesus point into a sentence.

Reflection

What do we learn from the foot-washing about Jesus death?

Look at Jesus relationship with the Father and also the humility he shows as the Master serves the servants.

Should we wash each others' feet – literally? Is it right to apply v.14 more generally and if so what is Jesus instruction to us here?

Consider what it is to humbly serve one another.

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Show us the Father!

John 14:1-14 – LEADER'S NOTES

Introduction

Write down a 25 word or less answer to the question: Who are you? Then have the person on your left write an answer to the question: "Who is the person on my right? Share both answers together for each person.

It is indeed interesting to find out how different people describe us – it is probably a reflection of how well they know us. In this passage, Philip asks Jesus to "Show us the Father." The answer he gets is perhaps not what he was expecting.

Analysis

Note that we have avoided detailed analysis of 14:1-6 as the preachers may want to focus on this section.

Read John 14:1-14.

Write out all the statements Jesus makes that connect him to the Father.

You should have something from the following verses: v.2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11. Note too in this section that all Jesus says here is really an appeal for faith in Him. He is saying, don't look for someone else, don't look for something else, when I am with you, the Father is here! Look to me! John 14:6!

Consider each of the connections and what it says about who Jesus is and his relationship to God.

So for example, when Jesus says, I am in the Father and the Father is in me, what does he mean and what does it teach us? There are a few things to observe:

1. It indicates the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son – like John 10:30 – there is not two God's, nor are they at odds, but there is one God who reveals himself as the Father, Son and Spirit
2. It indicates a true unity between the Father and the Son
3. It is this level of unity that ensure Jesus is able to reveal the Father to us.

Can you summarise the teaching of those verses into a sentence?

In light of this teaching Jesus instructs his disciples in v.12-14.

What is Jesus instruction in v.12 and what does he mean?

Disciples of Jesus will do even greater things than Jesus has been doing. Don Carson writes on this: The works that the disciples perform after the resurrection are great than those done by Jesus insofar as the former belong to an age of clarity and power rather than the age of veiled power as Jesus was on earth. Even his closest followers grasp only a little of what he was doing and saying. In the wake of Jesus glorification, his followers will be able to preach more clearly and do deeds more freely. There will be more disciples and more works of God's power.

What is Jesus instruction in v.13-14 and what does he mean?

Consider the nature of prayer carefully. Especially consider, in the face of seeing prayer as an automatic request system and Jesus as some sort of genie, what it means that prayer is to be said "in my name". Surely, when we pray for things outside the concern of God we ought not expect to get them!

Reflection

What are some of the argument that someone might run against Jesus divinity? How might this passage prepare you to explain to someone that Jesus is God?

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Send me the Spirit!

John 14:15–31 and John 16:5–16 – LEADERS’ NOTES

Introduction

Why do you think some Christians seek mystical experiences, while others are content without them?

A misunderstanding of God’s sovereignty or an unbalanced presentation of God’s ‘negative’ attributes or of his personal and intimate nature can lead to a pre-occupation with “experiences of God”. We are certainly not arguing that you can’t have an experience of God, but seeking such an experience is unnecessary when we understand verse 20 properly.

The Holy Spirit, who he is, what he does and where he is are often misunderstood by Christians. Our preaching series on the Spirit this year will hopefully clarify much of the misunderstanding. Here is another opportunity to think through the Spirit’s work.

Analysis

Read briefly John 1:32–34; 3:5, 34; 4:23–24; 7:37–39

What do we know about the Spirit from John’s Gospel before we get to chapter 14?

Read John 14:15–21

Who is it who sends the Spirit and why does Jesus say, he “will be” in you?

Consider the nature of Pentecost – Acts 2.

What does this passage say the Spirit will do in our relationship with Jesus?

Read John 14:22–31

What does this passage say the Spirit will do? What does this actually mean? Is this a promise to the first disciples or all disciples?

Given the context here, it is most likely that these are teachings for the first disciples about what Jesus would do for them. Look carefully from v.23–27 and you see Jesus changes the language from “anyone” to “you” meaning specifically the disciples. This also matches with the experience in Acts 1:8 and at Pentecost and throughout Acts and Peter’s comments on Scripture in 2 Peter 1:21

Read John 16:5–11 What does this passage say the task of the Holy Spirit is? Unpack each one in turn:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The work of the Spirit here is to shame the world and convince it of its own guilt, thus calling it to repentance. This is the work of the Spirit – to show us the need for God. To open our eyes to the fact that we are not God and need him. He convicts the world of sin because the people who are the world do not believe in Jesus. He convicts the world of its own righteousness and the error of such righteousness and the fact that it does not get you to the Father. Jesus does! He convicts the world of judgement and makes it clear that Satan will be judged.

Read John 16:12–15

What does this passage say the task of the Spirit is? What limitations are placed on the ministry of the Spirit?

See notes on John 14:22–31 above.

Reflection

How should this understanding of the Spirit’s work shape your prayers?

How might you respond to someone who said they had a “fresh revelation from the Spirit of God” that extends or contradicts the teaching of the Bible?

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Branches, Vines and Fruit

John 15:1-17 – LEADERS’ NOTES

Introduction

Share with the group your most successful or unsuccessful experience at trying to grow something!

Jesus often uses agricultural examples to illustrate his points – seeds, wheat, and fig trees feature prominently in his ministry. In this one, we get more than an illustration. It contains one of Jesus famous “I AM” statements and some further teaching on the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The links between v.1-8 and 9-16 are many – both speak of remaining, both hold up fruitfulness as the disciples’ goal, both tie fruitfulness to prayer. More importantly it is clear that v.9-16 act as a commentary on v.1-8.

Analysis

Read John 15:1-4 and fill in the following

What does the Father do	What does Jesus do?	What should you do?

What is the clear message of this section?

Don Carson writes: The clear purpose of this section is to insist that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit. Fruitfulness is an infallible mark of true faith. The alternative is dead wood that is cut off.

What do you think verse 3 is about and why does it use the language of “clean”?

Consider 13:1-17.

Read John 15:5-8

What does Jesus want from his branches? What is the blessing here described to the branches?

Read John 15:9-16

How do you actually remain in Jesus? Why is this the case?

Why is v.13-14 so important in this section?

How do you understand the interaction between the command in verse 12 and the reality in verse 16?

Note that Jesus commands us to bear fruit and love but then says he has appointed us to go and bear fruit. There is an interplay here between our responsibility to do what we are called to do and his goodness to us in enabling us to do what we are called to do. It is required of us that we are neither lazy and hoping God will do something, nor ignoring the strength of God to help us. You may want to explore this with your group some more.

Reflection

What do Christians need to do to remain a fruitful branches?

In what areas do you need work in order to remain a fruitful branch?

How might you encourage one another as a group to be fruitful branches?

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It Hated Me First!

John 15:18–16:4 – LEADERS’ NOTES

Introduction

Can you remember a time when you or a friend was chastised for being a Christian or holding a Christian point of view? What happened and how did the situation play out?

We often thank God in our prayers in church that we live in a country where we are free to gather and worship Jesus without fear of persecution. After working through this passage, you may have to change the content of that prayer, for Christian persecution, according to Jesus, has nothing to do with geography.

Analysis

READ John 15:18–25

There is a sense in which Jesus speaks here specifically to the disciples, but also generally to us.

What is the message to all Christians?

See v.18–23

What is the message specifically for the disciples?

See v22–25, noting that v.25 talks of “their Law”. So the people Jesus is talking about here are the Jewish leaders who have opposed him. See also 15:26–16:4

How does Jesus explain this hatred that people will have for us?

There seem to be two parts to it: v.20, v. 21. Explore verse 21 together especially – perhaps asking some subsidiary questions – why does Jesus refer to his name? What is the link to knowing the one who sent him?

What does it mean to have been “chosen out of the world”? (v.19) How do we experience this?

How might v.25 act as comfort to you when you are chastised for being a Christian?

It reminds us that none of the hatred displayed by the world should be thought of as jeopardising God’s plan of redemption. Even this rejection serves to fulfil what was written in the Law. The ironic point here is that the Jews’ own Scriptures are condemning their actions.

Reflection

How can you tell if someone belongs to the world?

How can you tell if someone belongs to Jesus?

Who do you belong to?

What do you need to do to firm up your allegiance to Jesus?

Should we thank God that we live in a country free of persecution or is our freedom from persecution a function of our silence or low-impact on society as Christians?

I know this is a controversial question but it needs to be asked. IN verse 20 Jesus sees a clear link between him and us. If we are not persecuted what does it really say about our faith? You may want to ask, if you are never chastised for being a Christian, are you really living a life belonging to Jesus?

How might this passage help you next time someone chastises you for being a Christian or holding a Christian point of view or how might you use it to comfort or encourage someone else?

Push past the trite answers here and get people to really think about how the Scriptures help us. Explore what you might really say and do with someone – rather than just sending them a verse on email.

Pray

Spend some time praying for people who are regularly or systematically persecuted for trusting in Jesus.

Leaders may want to look up www.opendoors.org.au for information on current prayer needs.

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When Joy Comes to Town!

John 16:17-33 – LEADERS' NOTES

Introduction

Share about a time when you had to farewell someone special to you. Why did they leave and where were they going?

In this passage, the disciples have heard Jesus talk about going to the Father but not quite understood him. While Jesus explains what he meant, he also reveals much about his and our relationship with the Father.

Analysis

READ 16:17-33

What event is Jesus talking (in 16:16) and the disciples questioning him about?

You may want to look at 7:33, 13:33 and the surrounding context. It is popular to see this as an enigmatic conversation that talks about all of Jesus' comings and goings, but the context really demands that we are speaking of his death and resurrection. See also v.22 and the next questions.

Why does Jesus say that no one will take away their joy once the little while is over? (v.22)

The resurrection is evidence of the truthfulness of the promise of our own resurrection. Who would not be glad and full of joy at that?? You may want to explore some application at this point in where Christian joy flows from, and whether the people in your group find joy in the knowledge of the resurrection and the promise it confirms.

Jesus moves on from the questioning to inform the disciples about two fundamental changes that will take place after the events being discussed:

Note the use of "in that day" in v.23 and "a time is coming" in v.25. He seems to be speaking of the time after his resurrection that we remain in today.

What is the change in v.23-24?

What is the change in v.25-28 and how is it connected to the prior change?

What does Jesus mean by v.26?

It is most likely that Jesus wants the people to realise that speaking to God in Jesus name is not restricting their access to God nor does Jesus convey everything to God, nor is God distant from them. In fact the opposite, in Jesus' redemptive work, he has brought God the Father close. Through him we have direct access to the father. So here we have a focus on the mediatorial role of the son in the plan of God. God loves us and wants to hear from us. (v.27)

Do you think the interaction between the disciples and Jesus in 29-32 is ironic or do they actually understand?

It is a strange interaction but remember that Jesus said understanding would come later. (v. 25). It appears to be ironic. Another case of the disciples claiming more than reality. Although in part they speak more than they know – Jesus did not need to question them to know what was in their minds and knew what was coming for them.

Reflection

What peace might we gain from a passage such as this? (16:33)

How does this passage stretch your understanding of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son?

How might this passage shape and inform your prayer life??

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Jesus Prays.

John 17:1-19 - LEADERS' NOTES

Introduction

What is your normal response when someone tells you they are praying for you? What do you think about having Jesus pray for you?

Over the next two studies we will look at Jesus prayer in John 17. It is a remarkable part of the Bible and not only reveals the heart of Jesus but also the purpose of his death and resurrection with remarkable clarity.

Don Carson notes that the prayer is a summary of the entire book of John to this point and all Jesus has done and taught. You could read through the prayer and look for connections with your group if they had a good handle on the book or were confidently biblically literate.

Analysis

READ John 17:1-5

What is Jesus asking for when he prays that he may be glorified?

Look at the context of v.1 and v.5 but also what he says in v.2-4. While glorify can mean praise and honour, the context here makes it a little different. He is asking the Father to reverse the incarnation and restore him to the splendour he had before the world began. And yet as he prays this, he is asking God to send him to the cross so that he can get to the point of splendour Carson writes: that Jesus should ask the Father to glorify the Son is a moving expression of his own willingness to obey the Father even to death.

How does Jesus explanation of eternal life match up with your own expectations? (v.3)

Most people will think of eternal life of life with God in heaven. The two are not distinct - it is just that heaven will be focussed on the glory of God and this is a fact we often miss. We think that heaven will somehow be focussed on us and is designed to please us and enable us to have a good time. It won't be all about you! It will be all about God and you will have personal knowledge of Him.

READ John 17:6-19

Note that this next section is for the disciples and 17:12 and 20 makes that clear.

Write a list of all the things Jesus says he has done.

Write a list of all the things he is about to do.

What are the things he actually prays for his disciples?

Why do you think he prayed these things?

What does verse 12 teach us about the world and how God interacts with the world?

What does verse 15 teach us about the plans God has for us?

Not just that he wants people in heaven, but he wants us to serve on earth first.

Reflection

What does Jesus intend for this prayer? (v.13)

Can we have the full measure of Jesus' joy within us? How might we go about achieving that?

See John 11:42, 15:11 as you seek to answer this question together.

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John 17:20-26