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A sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Chapel, Clapham
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"Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me." John 13. 7,8.

This chapter precedes those very sacred and remarkable discourses that Christ gave to His disciples immediately before He entered upon His sufferings and death. The chapter opens with a very remarkable doctrinal statement of divine truth, wherein we are assured that the Church of God, and every believer, abides in a covenant union with Christ. It discloses the abiding nature of the love of Christ towards His people. "Having loved His own which were in the world He loved them unto the end." It is your mercy, and mine, that God never changes in this respect toward His people, although we know that He does, and will, chasten them for their sins. This glorious revelation of the Gospel with respect to Christ's love towards His people embodies three vital and important points.

Firstly, a divine choice. Later in this chapter we find the Lord saying, "I speak not of you all, I know whom I have chosen." The prophet, too, speaks unto this end, "I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away." Nothing can change the purpose of God toward His own. Our great matter is to have it made clear to us by a divine testimony that we have interest therein. "We love Him, because He first loved us". Nothing can produce love in our hearts to the Lord Jesus but the love of Christ to us, and truly it can be said that if our hearts do really flow out in love to Him, in humility, in confession of our sins, and repentance, that is an evidence of divine choice.

Secondly, there is also in this truth necessarily a sacrifice made. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." It is true that noble men have made great sacrifices, and many of our own countrymen have bravely and loyally given their lives for the safety of others, and for their

country, but loyalty is not salvation. There can be no sacrifice to compare with the sacrifice of Calvary, neither can any love compare with the love of Christ.

Thirdly, there is also in this truth an inheritance prepared. Yes, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." God's kindness and goodness encircle and encompass His people throughout their earthly pilgrimage, though He is not disposed that they shall be immune from trial, affliction, loss, pain, grief, tribulation and death, and we have need to realise there is need for some discipline. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten". It is solemn, therefore, is it not to be in the hands of God thus, though it is very blessed, and some of the Lord's people have reaped some of their sweetest blessings in their bitterest trials. Thus the Lord, we find, is able to bring all to a good end, and to make all things work together for good to them that love Him, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

We may observe here a separating, discriminating line of truth. God's Word separates between the precious and the vile, between saved and lost, between death and life. Very solemn indeed is it for us to perceive that there was a traitor in that little company, a Judas, who had been in the society of Christ and of His disciples, and who, though he was with them, was not of them, as after events sadly proved. We do well to search and to try our ways, and to pray God that we may not fall a prey to the treachery of our own hearts. The case of Judas is doubtless put in the Scripture to show that a person may indeed live in an outward profession of religion, and be destitute of the saving grace of Christ in the heart. Oh, I have great need often to ask myself this question, "Shall I eventually prove like Judas, and though having preached to others, yet myself be a castaway?" How solemn these things are!

It will be our mercy if we are enabled by God's grace to wait on Him, praying to be kept at all times and under all conditions,

even if we are among His redeemed people, because by the teaching of this chapter we have evidence that a very gracious character may be left to his own spirit, and can make a rash statement without being properly aware of what he is saying. Christ had great love to Peter, and Peter had great love to Christ, but there was something about Peter that resented having his feet washed by the Saviour. Some may think that Peter considered it beneath the dignity of Christ so to act, but it seems probable that there was a spirit of independence and pride in Peter's heart concerning this. Christ first washed the feet of the other disciples, and then He cometh to Simon Peter, but Peter said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet". Here we see one side of Peter, but Christ had an effective reply to that, "If I wash thee not", He said, "thou hast no part with Me." There was no going round the point. Said Christ to Peter, Unless you are the subject of this washing, you have no part or lot with Me. That changed Peter altogether, and he said, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." But that was not necessary here, you see. "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit : and ye are clean but not all". Thus Peter was brought down from his impetuosity, and made perfectly willing to subject himself to have his feet washed by Christ.

There may be something significant about this matter of washing the feet. We would not be fanciful, but it appears to represent Christ's sanctifying grace in the hearts of His people. We all need this washing. It is essential to us in order to have experimental union with Christ. What need there is for separation in our heart and life from this world, and though, as we hope, we have been washed from our sins by the blood of Christ, yet we have constant need of this internal washing of His sanctifying grace to keep us from the ways of sin. We need to seek that sin forgiven in the past may guard us against committing sin in the future. I believe that a sinner with a taste and sense of forgiveness in the heart will be very deeply conscious of his need.

of continual preservation from outward evil. Lord, wash my feet continually - Peter was brought there. He had to be shown himself. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me."

Now the Lord taught a very real lesson to His disciples here by practical and yet very simple means. Sometimes a simple action may be more effective than a lengthy discourse, yea, than a number of sermons. Actions often speak louder than words. This act of Christ, in washing the disciples' feet, was a very simple one so far, in that it was a usual custom for servants to wash the feet of their superiors. It was an Eastern practice, very condescending on the part of Christ to His disciples, but there was teaching in it. It was simple, speaking, revealing, effective, and very significant. There was a depth of teaching underlying a very plain outward action. It was a mode of teaching by way of example, of which He Himself was a most illustrious pattern. "He riseth", we read, "from supper, and laid aside His garments, took a towel, and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded. Then cometh He to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto Him, Lord, dost Thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For He knew who should betray Him; therefore said He, Ye are not all clean. So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?" Now, He says, do you know what I have been doing? It would be easy to answer with respect to the outward action, but there was a depth of meaning beneath it which at the time was not clear to them. The action was simple and clear, but the design was obscure, and there appears

to be no answer given by the disciples. None is recorded. "Know ye what I have done to you. Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." But all seemed mysterious to them; so did many things at that time; things concerning His decease, His departing from them. His mission in the world was not clear to them, though they believed Him to be the Son of God.

But is there not something strikingly significant about this washing? "He laid aside His garments". We read, "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God, He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments." Does not this seem to illustrate the coming by incarnation of the Lord Jesus to earth? He had perfect knowledge of the mission that He had to fulfil, and what was before Him in the near future. But oh! What think you of this condescending grace? He laid aside, so to speak, those royal robes, that heavenly majesty, the visible glory of His divine nature as the eternal Son of God, assumed human nature, became a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. "He laid aside His garments." All this was necessary in order that He might do the will of God and accomplish the work of redemption. He prepared Himself to this end. He was resolved in His own heart to perfect in every detail all that was essential to make His people's salvation firm and sure. He washed their feet to show that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to teach them also this lesson of humility. Christ is His people's sanctification, and the frequent cleansing we all need is by the sacrifice of Christ. "In order that He might sanctify the people with His own blood" we read, "He suffered without the gate." Christ Himself was a pattern of humility. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant....He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." "He laid aside

His garments." The glory of His deity was veiled before the eyes of men in His pure, sacred humanity. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin" and all this to open a way from hell to heaven for fallen, guilty, ruined man. He fulfilled to perfection the will of His Father, He paid the ransom price, He redeemed us from the curse, terrors and sanctions of a broken law, and opened the door of heaven to us. He is our true sanctification.

Sanctification is threefold. Firstly, in the divine purposes of God in separating a people unto Himself. Secondly, in the sacrifice of Christ, whereby they are washed from all their sins and are presented "a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." Thirdly, in the internal work of the Holy Spirit "by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." This produces that clean, holy, separating, life-giving principle of the fear of God, thereby separating His people unto Himself. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself." This is sanctification. But a child of God, being shown his infirmities, sins and failings, will be continually saying, "Lord, wash my feet; keep my feet clean; give me grace to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith I am called; preserve me from any breaking out of the inherent evils of my fallen nature and depraved heart; help me to walk tenderly and uprightly before Thee. Wash my feet."

Thus the Lord taught His disciples the lesson of humility. It was a hard lesson taught by an easy action. It did not take long, but in that brief, simple procedure, there was that presented to their minds which took a lifetime to learn. It was a lesson by pattern and example of the grace of humility, and a right spirit of charity toward each other. What is humility? It is firstly, a disesteem of self. Oh what pride we have in our poor hearts, have we not? Yet the Lord can work this principle in a heart that is reeking with pride. He knows how to humble a sinner. There is something very sweet about this humility. When it is really in exercise in the heart, one will be willing and anxious to take the lowest place. It is opposed to the spirit of pride. "Let this

mind be in you" says Paul to the Philippians, "which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." What an example He was! This grace was very evident in John the Baptist. When the disciples came to him saying "He that was with thee beyond Jordan, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him, John replied "A man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven." - I have nothing but that which the Lord hath given. - "I am not the Christ. He must increase, but I must decrease." That was true humility. It consists in a gracious willingness to be nothing, that Christ may be all in all. This is receiving the kingdom, and serving Him with reverence and godly fear. This grace also consists in a renouncing of self for Christ's sake, and of everything that may come into competition with Him in salvation. Paul had this principle in his heart when he said "The things that were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." Humility rises to its highest point and beauty in a sinner when he is brought freely and unreservedly to fall at the feet of Christ, renouncing all merit in himself and depending wholly upon the merits of Christ. Faith will give Him all the glory. It will take nothing to self. It is very sweet to feel a little real humility in the heart sometimes. When it is given you can lie low at His feet. Then you can admire the beauties of Christ, and feel a sweet reliance upon Him. Your spirit will be prepared to worship Him in spirit and in truth. To be humble is to be teachable. "That which I see not teach Thou me." "Lord, open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." It behoves us to be teachable, having the heart opened to receive divine instruction and divine discipline.

Jesus answered and said unto them "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." The action in itself was clear and simple, but the design was obscure. The disciples could not seem to see the purpose or follow the teaching, and it is noticeable that some matters were not made clear to them

concerning Christ until after His resurrection, ascension into heaven, and gift of the Holy Ghost. Then the whole purpose and end of His mission was clearly and fully revealed to them, and with great power they gave witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But they did not know then what the Lord's design and purpose was in this, for afterwards, when Christ had finished, He questioned them, saying, "Know ye what I have done unto you?" But there is no reply recorded. We do not find them saying, "Oh yes, I know what you mean, I can distinguish the teaching." We see here "through a glass, darkly." In respect of many things our knowledge is imperfect. We know but in part, and the Lord designs that it shall be so. We are not to see the end of a thing from the beginning.

"What I do thou knowest not now." He does not say "Neither will you ever know", but rather "there is a time coming, a future time, when that which is now dark, mysterious, conflicting, and confounding, will be made clear and plain." He "brings the blind by a way that they know not" and "in paths that they have not known". He "makes darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." These things will He "do unto them, and not forsake them." This word is true both with respect to providential and spiritual things. In reading the Scriptures we may see how God thus dealt with men. He did not make His purpose, His design, His end, fully known to them while they were passing through the trials that were laid upon them. The ultimate end was not disclosed beforehand, but made known to them afterwards. Was it not so in the case of Abraham? "And God said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." How mysterious and conflicting! "What I do thou knowest not now". Abraham had no intimation beyond the commission to make the sacrifice, but he obeyed the command, not knowing then what God intended thereby. All must have been extremely dark to him. What a death suddenly came upon every promise of future blessing in Isaac! Who can imagine the pain of his heart when, ascending the

mount for that purpose, his dearly beloved son Isaac said to him, "Father, here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" "What I do thou knowest not now". But Abraham had to journey on in faith, and great faith it was, too, for we read that he "accounted that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure."

Could Jacob foresee the design and purpose of God in some things he passed through? Could he foresee the Lord's future purposes? Could he indicate how all would end well with him when he told his sons that they would bring down his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, and said "All these things are against me"? Supposing someone had come to Jacob then and said "Jacob, all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose". You can imagine Jacob responding at the moment, "Such a word has no application to me, at least at the present time. All these things are against me". "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." So Jacob found it in the end, for those very things that seemed as though they would bring him to his death were the means of delivering him from it. How wonderfully and mysteriously the Lord ordered things, so that provision in the time of famine was made for him in a most unanticipated way.

Do you have to walk in some paths that look as black as night to you, where you can see no way out of them, no prospect of deliverance from them, and can hardly dare to anticipate material relief from them? "What I do thou knowest not now". In the Lord's dispensations with His people there is a gradual unfolding of His will. That will, which is secret in Himself, is only known to us in the revelation of it, therefore we cannot go forward and anticipate what His future purposes are. Here we have need to walk by faith (for we cannot by sight) humbly relying on the promise given to the saints of God in the path of tribulation, "As thy day so shall thy strength be".

Could Joseph see how all was going to end well when he was shut up in the prison house under false accusations? We read of him

that when he was there, laid in irons "the word of the Lord tried him", and well it might. Probably it has tried you. You may sometimes, so to speak, have had to look at a promise wherein formerly you saw such a beauty in the goodness and faithfulness of God, and yet later, in that very same promise, and connected therewith, you may have had to pass through a sharp fire of temptation. "What I do thou knowest not now". The Lord will go before us, but He will see that we do not go before Him. It is faith that casts itself into the hands of God concerning His disposings of us.

Could Job see how all would end well, when for seven days and nights, without uttering a word, he sat down among the ashes, scraping himself with a potsherd? Could he go to the end of that story and see how it would work out, and say, "My latter end will be more blessed than my beginning? There are better days coming than ever I have had before". No, he could not. "What I do thou knowest not now."

Could Jeremiah straighten things in the Lord's ordering of providence when, in the twelfth chapter of his prophecy he says "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee: yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper, and wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" "They seem permitted to have their will and wishes". As though he would say "Lord, Thou art righteous, I would not reason on that point, I believe Thy word, but here is a difficulty, a trouble that I cannot understand. Why is this? Why should it be?" "What I do thou knowest not now". Let faith leave that which is not revealed in God's secret purposes until He disposes to make it plain.

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face."

Habakkuk had similar conflict of mind. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity. Wherefore lookest Thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest Thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous

than he?" But the Lord answered him saying, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie." "What I do thou knowest not now."

Let us remember, that though we are accountable to God, He is not accountable to us. We have no claim upon God to explain hidden mysteries, or presume to bring Him to the bar of human reason. It is a grievous sin to attempt to make God a creature of our imagination. That is the effect of carnal reasoning when the Lord's purposes are not revealed. Has the Lord put you in a trial, a furnace, some grievous affliction, wherein you say, "What does the Lord mean by this?" What is the trial for? What will the end of it be?" If this be your case, rest content with this, "What I do thou knowest not now." If you try to find out, the Lord will keep it hidden from you until His time comes.

Daniel seemed to be in a similar case when, after being informed of the times as recorded in the last chapter, he enquires, "Oh my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" But the Lord said, "Go thy way Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. But go thou thy way till the end be, for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." That was very comforting for Daniel. Do you say "Lord, what does this cross mean?" The answer is "What I do thou knowest not now". "It is not time yet". What is to be done then? Why, we must walk by faith, for we cannot by sight. Go thy way; carry thy cross; stand in the fire until deliverance comes. "Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days." What does that mean? "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee." "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined." But all to a good end and purpose. "They shall call on My name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is My people; and they shall say the Lord is my God."

Now take spiritual experience. When the Lord began to deal with you in conviction of sin, could you foresee His purpose? What could you see then but condemnation and death? Did you not fear and feel you would be cut off, as beyond the limit of His mercy?

Did the assurance of future experience in the way of comfort, hope, consolation, and joy in Christ, rise clear to your mind when you were charged with your guilt? Was the Lord's design by those solemn convictions that stirred your conscience clear to your view at the beginning? "What I do thou knowest not now." It applies also with respect to one held in legal bondage, bound under the law, feelingly condemned, held fast, shut up as in a prison. Can such an one say "I know the Lord will appear in due time, and my deliverance will be sure?" No, he cannot foresee what the Lord disposes to do. It seems then as though the Lord will cut him off without mercy. "What I do thou knowest not now". You may be in a sharp temptation concerning something, and that temptation may seem to prevail over you for the time being, and how can you anticipate deliverance and be assured that you will come out well? You cannot. "What I do thou knowest not now." It is as though the Lord were thus speaking, Now here is this trial, this cross, this furnace, walk in it; walk in it. My purpose concerning it will be revealed in due time, but what that purpose will be you must wait My time to see. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." The Lord clears things up in His own time, yes, and in His way too. There may be things that you have to deal with God about- dark things, dark providences; things that you cannot reconcile even with God's justice and faithfulness and love; very crooked things. And what about them? "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." As though the Lord would say, "I have a purpose, and you will know what it is in due time - that is, some future time. If you have mysteries, dark, perplexing confusing things, and you cannot see how they are going to work out, or what the issue will be, what can you do? Wait on God only. Say you, but it seems to no purpose. I remain dark and confused. Wait on God only. But things become more crooked. I come into deeper darkness than before. Wait on God in the darkness. "What I do thou knowest not now". Mercifully, He does not say, you never will. He has set the time, and the trial of faith will be made precious in the issue.

We may carry this word "hereafter" beyond our mortal state, because some things may continue dark to us while we are in this life, even unto our dying day, for "we see through a glass, darkly". Our knowledge is but imperfect, very imperfect, very weak. "We know in part" but the, "hereafter", in a future state (perhaps not in this present state) all will be made plain. Then the veil will be lifted from these mysterious, perplexing things. Darkness will be made light then, and God's will and God's way will be clearly and fully made known to us. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."