# Intro:

## A few months ago, I asked a friend – a rather prominent academic – for his assessment of a book that had been given to me.

### I’d not yet read it. Neither had he, but he took my copy and while we were chatting about it, over the course of about three minutes, he dissected it and then turned to the four or five critical pages and told me what they would say.

### He looked at the endorsements and publisher, glanced at the table of contents, read the first paragraph and then the concluding paragraph of the first chapter. Then he turned to the indexes in the back and skimmed them to see which had the most entries – I knew what he was doing because I’d read Adler’s book on How to Read a Book, and I did the same thing, only at about one one-hundredth the speed he was operating.

### This was fascinating to watch – and a little discouraging. And then he turned to a few pages and said, “the important part is going to these four or five pages. His point is going to be – and then he told me what the guy was going to say. He identified the critical section of the book.

## I do not think it’s possible for anyone to spend three minutes with the Bible and come away with the same kind of overview.

### The Bible is pretty unique – for starters, there are 66 books by forty different authors employing a variety of genre. It is a unified whole, but not in the same way that the book I had handed him is unified.

### But if you could, my friend would have earmarked the pages we are studying.

### There is a sense in which the entire book pivots in the last week of Christ’s life.

#### The Old Testament points ahead to the New.

#### The New Testament points to the Gospels.

#### The Gospels point to the last week of Christ’s life.

#### And we could go one step further and say – the last week points to Friday through Sunday.

##### We are not there yet, but we are in the last week.

## We are walking through the second half of the Gospel of John – which is sometimes referred to as “the Book of Glory.” It is nine chapters that detail the events between his triumphal entry and his resurrection.

## In the beginning of John 12, Jesus parades into Jerusalem for the Passover – which is the big holiday for the Jews: it’s like the fourth of July and Christmas mixed together and spread out over a week.

## At this point, his time is short. He knows he is going to die. He has been saying as much – though the disciples have refused to hear as much. But he has not only come to Jerusalem to die, he has timed his arrival to coincide with the Passover, because his claim is that it has always been about him – that He is the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

### His claim is that over a thousand years earlier, when Moses told the Jews to take a one year old, unblemished male lamb, to slay it – without breaking any of its bones – and then to paint its blood over the door of their home so that the Angel of Death would know to pass over this house, not claiming the life of the first born male – that the lamb was a placeholder for Jesus.

### His claim is that the entire Passover celebration had been designed to foreshadow what He was about to do.

### His claim is that for a thousand years and in hundreds of ways God has been hammering home the idea that sin equals death, but that an innocent third party can die so that guilty people can go free.

## All kinds of story lines come together in the final week of Christ’s life. And that is what we are going to be looking at over the next few months as we approach Easter.

### We will see Jesus turn away from the crowds to focus on the disciples.

#### We go from John 3:16 – God so loved the World, to a more focused set of actions and attention on his key people.[[1]](#endnote-1)

### We will listen as He reinforces key points – as he talks about love and clarifies His mission.

### We will also see how he deftly navigates the power plays all around him.

# **John 13:1: It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.**This was all set up in last week’s text. In John 12 we noted that after Andrew told Jesus that there were people there to see him, Jesus had replied, “It is time for the Son of Man to be glorified.” It’s go time. After many occasions in which Jesus had said, “my time has not yet come,” he was now saying, “it’s time.”

# **Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end**. There is this idea that it is easier to love people in theory than individuals in practice. In an old Peanuts cartoon, Linus yells, “I love humanity. It’s people I can’t stand.” This line seems to suggest Jesus was consistent in his love.

# V2: **The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus.** Cue the music in a minor key. Judas has already been compromised. He has not yet gone to the authorities and agreed to identify Jesus to them and tell them where he is staying. But he has decided to do so.

# **V3: Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God:** One of the questions Christian theologians try to answer is: what did Jesus know and when did he know it?

## This goes to his dual nature – what we call the Hypostatic Union. The idea, which is spelled out in the Chalcedonian Definition in 451, which was added to the Nicene Creed back in the Jesus is fully God and fully human.

## In Philippians 2:5-11, which I refer to often because it is such a key passage about Christ - we are told that Jesus emptied himself.

### What does that mean? How did it happen?

### The incarnation was a big deal – and a scandalous one in one sense. God made himself vulnerable:

## We know from Luke 2 that Jesus “grew in wisdom and stature.”[[2]](#endnote-2) So he didn’t know everything as an infant. What did he know about himself and when did he learn it.

## What we are being told here is that Jesus now knows that the father has put all things under his power and that He had come from God and was going back to God.

## We also know that He knows he is going to die and – as we will see in a moment – that Judas is going to betray him.

# In the margins let me note a few things about power. Jesus has special power and power is a complicated thing.

## I did some reading on power this week. Oh my goodness. There is so much written and so much to say. I went looking for a simple definition and did not find one. I found myself writing, power falls into that category of things that are “powerful.” Really? Wow, I need more coffee.

## There is high power and low power and cultural power and formal power and power distance and a lot of ways we could get sidetracked. I am going to assume you know what I mean by power.

### It is some sort of ability to get things done.

### It can make the good better, but it can make the bad worse.

### And it is hard to control – indeed it tends to corrupt those who have it.

#### Lord Acton famously said, “Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

#### Of course, he is wrong about this. Jesus clearly refutes Lord Acton’s dictum. And he does so by stooping to serve. But, Acton is to be forgiven. He doesn’t have much company.

## In important ways, power is like fire and sex and money. These are things that have big upsides but also really big downsides. Fire can heat a house and cook food and… it can burn everything down. Sex can lead to deep connection and joy and intimacy and babies – and… and yet is it also associated with rape and objectification and porn addiction.

## Money is likewise complicated.

### Which is why Jesus spends more time talking about it than he does prayer.

### We are told in 1 Tim 6, that the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil.

#### For the record – money is not the root of all evil. Money has upsides, but it is a force (and please note, I wanted to say “power”) it is a force that few can manage.

#### All of this is what Tolkien was trying to get to with the ring. Few could handle it. It quickly corrupted everyone. And he chooses to have a small, weak person carry it.

## OK, well, enough of that for now.

# V4: **So Jesus got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.**

## As you may know, people had particularly dirty feet back then

### It was a hot and dusty climate. There were a lot of animals on the roads. People wore open toe-ed sandals. And we are talking about feet – which at their best are not great.

### I’m tempted to say: they are not Brynn’s feet. I’ve not subjected you to stories about our grand-daughter, because I fear I might embarrass myself. I was thinking of her because while her feet are soft and cute, they’ve never been walked on.

## We do not have a modern equivalent to foot-washing. Perhaps the closest we get is cleaning a public bathroom.

### They need to be cleaned or it’s bad for everyone. But no one really wants to do it.

### And Jews were not supposed to do it. It wasn’t against God’s law. You will not read this in Leviticus. But the Rabbi’s said as much.

### And yet, Jesus is going to clean the disciples’ feet.

# V6: **He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”** This is a question that Peter should not have to ask. Washing the disciples’ feet is just the kind of thing Jesus has been doing. His entire life has been filled with these kind of surprises.

## Some writers have made much of some parallels between what happens here and the big picture of his incarnation spelled out in Phil. 2:5f- :[[3]](#endnote-3)

### John says he “rose from the supper” just like he rose from his throne in heaven to descend.

### He laid aside his garments, just as he had laid aside his glory.

### He wraps himself in a towel just as he wrapped himself in humanity.

### And after he had done this, he took up his garments and returned to the seat of honor – just as Phil. 2 says “God will highly exalt him…”.

# **7Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.** Which is true. There was a lot they did not get.

# **“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me**.” Why doesn’t Peter want Jesus to wash his feet?

## It might be that he feels unworthy of the attention.

## It might be that he is embarrassed for Jesus. It is hard to watch someone we care about be humbled, to say nothing of them being humiliated.

## I suspect Peter would be very willing to wash Christ’s feet and regrets he was slow to do it earlier.

## But I suspect two other things are going on. First, I suspect he is uncomfortable being the recipient of care.

### One of the things I end doing as a pastor is asking people to let others help them. Many – not all, but many - who get knocked down do not want or do not feel worthy of the care others want to provide.

### Some of this – honestly – is just pride. Not always ugly pride. But they do not want the attention nor to be a burden. And I have to say, “one of the things you are going to need to do – almost as of service for to others – is to let them help you. They want to do something. Let them do something: the laundry, pick you kids up at school, bring a meal. That is hard because we do not want to be the one helped we want to be the helper.

### So, maybe some of that is going on.

## But I think the big thing is, Peter is embarrassed for himself.

### He has given up everything for Jesus. He is not excited by the idea that the one he is following is not as glorious, glamorous and powerful as he thought, because this immediately impacts his identity.

### He wants the Jesus of the Triumphal Entry – who everyone is calling king and laying out Palm branches to follow

### If you are an intern with X, you want X to look good, because your identity is tied up with theirs. When Jesus was healing people and speaking with authority and making the pompous Pharisees look foolish, being associate with Jesus was a fun thing. If he was going to start cleaning pubic restrooms that is altogether different.

### Peter’s telling Jesus not to wash other’s feet is Peter protecting Peter’s pride. Because a servant is not greater than his or he master.[[4]](#endnote-4)

## Christ’s response when Peter says, “no” suggests that more than foot-washing is at stake;

## But notice, Jesus is not sidetracked by this at all. He is not afraid to assert his authority. To use his power.

### It is clear that He is in charge and He sets the terms. We do not get to dictate to Jesus how things are going to unfold. He does not adapt to our agenda. We must adapt to his.

# **“V9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well**!” Leave it to Peter to jump from one side of the argument to the next.

## Years ago, I was in a “discussion” with a guy. I was advocating change – which is often not popular. He was against it. And our discussion was not heated but it was tense. We disagreed and things were escalating. And all of the sudden, he jumped to the other side of the argument (my side) and started berating me for being against the idea.

## And I was confused – and I glanced over at one of the other people in the room with an obvious confused look on my fact. And he leaned back behind the other guy and does the “cut” sign. Which meant, “don’t you dare say anything.” And afterwards he told me, “yes, he jumped to the other side of the argument. He does that. But I could tell you were about to ruin everything by pointing it out.”

## That other guy was a lot like Peter. He brought a lot of drama with him.

# **V10: Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean.** Many have drawn the suggestion here that if we have been baptized you only need confession of ongoing sins. Yeah, sort of.

## When it comes to biblical interpretation, we always want to focus on the passages that are clear. (I do not believe that baptism saves, but it is important. Sign up if you have not been baptized).

# **And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean.** This is Judas. Jesus has been caring for him. Judas is going to betray Jesus.

## There is an interesting study of power here: Judas has some power. He is going to sell his access to Jesus. But he is keeping all of this secret. (Which is a way of multiplying power – to not let others know what power you have). You give up some power by admitting that you have power.

## Jesus has all power, and he is not using it to stop Judas, he is caring for others.

# **12When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them.** The answer is almost certainly no. We’ve read enough by this point to know that they do not get it quickly. In their defense, a lot of this is not really clear until they get on the other side of the resurrection.

# **V13: “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.** Let me note again, Jesus lives simply and he serves, but he boldly claims to be God. He does not hide his identity or power.

# **V14: Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you**. In the margins I will note, I think Mother Teresa read this memo.

# V16: **Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them**. A great note here about the need to apply what we know. Many people suffer from a lack of Vitamin A – application.

# We could stop here and focus on Jesus, noting:

## His humility. We have no other example of this in Greco-Roman culture.[[5]](#endnote-5)

## We could also focus on his remarkable poise and endurance

### He serves and teaches in spite of what he is facing. Jesus is the opposite of a snowflake. He is wilting under pressure or micro-aggressions. He is beyond resilient.

### Jesus has developed an inner world that is stronger than his outer world.

## We could focus on his forgiveness and patience of Jesus. It doesn’t say he washed feet of 11, but of 12. This is the feet of the one who was setting him up

## We could pause here and focus on the nature of Love

### I’m not sure anything new could be said. Love has been much discussed.

### But there is a lot we need to hear again and again. It is important to note that

#### Jesus argument is not based on the lovableness of the apostles.

#### We think of love as being easy. We can romanticize love because they are attractive.[[6]](#endnote-6)

#### Love is service, action

#### What many call love is really hunger – you make me feel good, significant. I want you to make me feel better.

## We could pause here and focus on the need for baptism. Sign up.

# Let me suggest an obvious take-away. Jesus teaches and demonstrates that if you are a Christian, you need to kill pride and use your power for the well-being of others.

## This is what God did and that is what he demands. Don’t overthink this.

## As I noted last week, Jesus is not only an example. He is Lord, God and King. He is eternal. He is perfect. He is our savior. Those who reduce Jesus to an example get it wrong. That is not what he claims.

## And Jesus is clear, we are to give up our pride and serve.

## How might you take steps in this direction? This seems like a good small group discussion question.

### We cannot change our hearts, but we can place ourselves in positions where they are changed.

1. The word ‘world’ occurs often in John’s Gospel, primarily to draw a sharp contrast between Jesus’ ‘own’, his disciples, and the mass of lost humanity, the ‘world’ from which they were drawn and in which they must live until their final vindication. If God loves the world (3:16), it is in order to draw men and women out of it. Those so drawn out constitute a new entity, set over against the world: the world loves its ‘own’, Jesus loves his ‘own’ (15:19). The object of the love of God in Christ, in these chapters, is therefore not the lost world, but the newly forming people of God, the disciples of the Messiah, the nascent church, the community of the elect. Jesus had loved his own all along; he now showed them the full extent of his love. (D.A. Carson, Commentary on John) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Luke 2:52 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Darrell Johnson, “The King Whose Scepter is a Towel, John 13:1-7,” *Preaching Today*, 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. By the way, Peter is unlikely to be alone here. In John ??, you have the scene were the Sons of Thunder ask to be seated at the right and left of Jesus in power. The text says ?????. Well, you can be sure they were all miffed because they wanted those seats, or at the very least, they didn’t want to be at the bottom. They were very sensitive to the slights. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ### See John Dickerson’s book, *Humilitas,* for a discussion about how Jesus changed the perception of humility from a bad thing to a good one.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In his sermon on this passage, Keller notes that many have a romantic view of love. That is – not a view of love that is limited to romance and sex, but an idealized view of love. Our view is romanticized. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)