

John 13:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.

Analysis

He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments (ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνου καὶ τίθησιν τὰ ἱμάτια)—The verb "laid aside" (τίθησιν/tithēsin) is the same word used in John 10:11, 15, 17-18 where Jesus says the Good Shepherd "lays down" (τίθησιν) His life. This isn't coincidence—John is showing the foot-washing as a symbolic anticipation of Calvary. Jesus voluntarily lays aside His garments as He will voluntarily lay down His life.

And took a towel, and girded himself (καὶ λαβὼν λέντιον διέζωσεν ἑαυτόν)—Jesus assumes the posture of a servant. The towel (λέντιον/lention, a Latin loan-word) was the servant's uniform. To "gird" (διέζωσεν/diezōsen) oneself with a towel was to prepare for menial labor. The Lord of glory dresses as a slave.

Historical Context

In Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, social hierarchy was rigid. Masters didn't serve slaves; rabbis didn't serve disciples. Yet Isaiah 53 prophesied a Suffering Servant who would bear others' sins, and Philippians 2 celebrates Christ's self-emptying. The early church saw foot-washing as both a literal practice of hospitality (1 Timothy 5:10) and a symbolic picture of Christian humility and mutual service. Some traditions made it a sacrament; others saw it as an acted parable of sanctification (John 13:8-10).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's laying aside His garments foreshadow His laying down His life at the cross?
2. What does it mean for those "in Christ" to likewise "gird themselves" for humble service to others?
3. In what areas of life are you most resistant to taking the servant's role, and why?

Interlinear Text

ἐγείρεται ἐκ τοῦ δείπνου καὶ τίθησιν τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ
He riseth from supper and laid aside garments and
G1453 G1537 G3588 G1173 G2532 G5087 G2440 G2532

λαβὼν λέντιον διέζωσεν ἑαυτόν.
took a towel and girded himself
G2983 G3012 G1241 G1438

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 8:9 (Parallel theme): For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Luke 22:27 (Parallel theme): For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

Luke 12:37 (Parallel theme): Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

Luke 17:7 (Parallel theme): But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

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